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**A Phenomenological Study
of Clients' Experiences of
Counselling
in a
Pastoral Setting**

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Dissertation submitted to the University of Liverpool
for the Degree of Master of Arts [Counselling Studies]
in part fulfilment of the Modular Programme
in Counselling Studies.

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Abstract

In this study four people were interviewed about their experiences of counselling in a pastoral setting. The setting is a Counselling Service which is one of the many projects under the auspices of the Church of England's Committee for Social Responsibility.

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain relevant information. The transcribed interviews were analysed in terms of the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis.

The analysis of these interviews reveal that the Christian context of the counselling experience was by far the most reflected on by clients. This study provides evidence that the accommodation of Christian beliefs and values within the counselling process was instrumental for therapeutic change to occur for these particular individuals. The quality of the counselling relationship was of central concern to all the participants in the study and clearly underpinned the therapeutic process. Counsellors were reported as being, open, friendly, caring people without pretentious expertise. Feeling safe and comfortable, being accepted, and not being judged by the counsellor were reported as important aspects of the relationship and set the foundation for a positive therapeutic outcome.

As discussed, the aim of this study is not to propose any 'universal truths' about clients' experience. However, this glimpse into the subjective experience of clients provides valuable learning about the nature of counselling from the point of view of the client and raises some implications for the Diocesan Counselling Service and for the practice of the counselling profession in general.

Declaration:

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in respect of any qualification or course.

Acknowledgements:

This study would not have been possible without the people who took part. I must express my appreciation of their willingness to share personal experiences with candour and honesty. I feel privileged that they felt able to allow me to share a part of them that is immensely private. It was a very special experience that I deeply value and look on as a significant part of my learning.

I would also like to thank the following people for their help, encouragement and patience in the development of this study:

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This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Marjorie

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Introduction

As a student of counselling I have a preference for case studies and personal experience's of counselling, either counsellor or client, rather than reading the recommended theoretical disciplines. Sometimes theory can appear divorced from reality and, for me, real life stories have the page turning quality that academic theories rarely possess. It is unusual to begin an investigation into the nature of counselling by looking at the point of view of the client; traditionally counselling studies begin with a theoretical perspective. However, a client's perspective offers a much simpler picture, a single experiential view and account of their experiences whatever the psychotherapeutic orientation of their counsellor [Howe, 1993]. My primary incentive for this study is my firm belief that it is only by asking people about their experience of counselling that we are able to learn about the nature of counselling from the point of view of the client.

An initial literature search revealed that since Carl Rogers examined 'the therapeutic relationship as experienced by the client' published in 1951, direct inquiry into exploring the client's view has seldom been undertaken [McLeod, 1994a; 1994b]. McLeod [1994a] argues that the absence of research results from a number of powerful forces at work within the counselling profession. For example, the strong institutional pressure in the field of research to follow the assumptions and practices of natural science which sees subjective feelings or beliefs of clients as not researchable. Many counsellors emphasise empowerment and equality between client and counsellor, rather than the stance of delivering professional expertise. Yet in practice it is not easy to create possibilities for clients to feed back to their counsellors their views about the service they have received. There are serious ethical and practical difficulties involved in doing research of this

kind [McLeod, 1994a; 1994b]. The studies that do address the client's experience vary widely in terms of the phenomena addressed and the method of analysis applied to them, so that it is difficult to make general conclusions about the nature of the client's experience of counselling [Rennie, 1992]. The experience of the client is always different from that of the counsellor, sometimes in unexpected ways [Rennie, 1998] and if practitioners do not hear clients, they will be out of touch with their needs.

My motivation for embarking on this study stems from my work as a counsellor for the Church of England, the Diocesan Counselling Service. The background of this agency will be discussed later. My initial thoughts regarding a research proposal was to simply ask clients about their experience of counselling. But my thoughts were also around the notion of the likeness between the counselling relationship and the traditional Christian pastoral relationship, prompting the following questions:

- * Why do people choose a Counselling Service that is provided by the Church of England?
- * Do people approach the Counselling Service simply because their minister has guided them there?
- * Are counsellors given 'authority' because the clergy advocate the service?
- * Is counselling in this setting used for the provision of the 'hearing of confession'?
- * Do counsellors occupy a place that was previously the domain of priests?

To date there has been no evaluation of the Counselling Service from the client's perspective. Indeed, relatively few counselling agencies have set up a system for collecting information about client views, largely because of the ethical and practical difficulties involved in such an investigation [McLeod, 1994b]. While there

has been some growth in the publication of research studies into pastoral practice in the United States, the lack of research in pastoral care and counselling in Britain, particularly studies that evaluate and explore client's experience is negligible Lynch [1999]. I personally conducted a literature search using the Psychlit and ATLA Religion CD-ROM databases covering the last twenty years and found very little material concerning pastoral practice and none exploring clients' views of pastoral care or of counselling in a pastoral setting.

It is not usual to ask for the client's opinion of their experience of counselling. Most research has relied on either the perspective of the therapist or that of an external observer, since to involve the client could intrude on his or her therapy, or cause distress. Most studies that have involved collecting data from clients have used standardised questionnaires or rating scales. This means the experience of the client is filtered through categories and dimensions imposed by the researcher [McLeod, 1993].

The rationale for this study is therefore:

- * My personal interest in clients' phenomenological experiences of counselling.
- * The importance of clients' experiences in the counselling process.
- * The apparent lack of empirical research which explores the client's experience of counselling in a pastoral setting.
- * The responsibility to demonstrate the efficacy of the Diocesan Counselling Service
- * Gaining a wider perspective for the counselling profession in general.

The Counselling Service

Part of my practice as a counsellor includes working for the Diocesan Counselling

Service. This Service is just one of the many projects under the auspices of the Church of England's Committee for Social Responsibility [CSR]. The Counselling Service aims to provide a high quality therapeutic service within a Christian setting. The team of counsellors are professionally qualified and the service works to the British Association for Counselling's Code of Ethics and Practice [BAC, 1993]. The philosophy underlying the service is that counsellors work from a broadly Christian perspective, drawing upon their personal faith rather than using it as a rigid framework for counselling. However, they are well placed to include the spiritual, religious and Christian dimensions into the counselling process if the client expresses a wish for this. There is a wide range of experience within the counselling team and clients present a variety of issues that are typical to counselling in general: personal problems; marital and relationship difficulties; loss and grief; abuse. The people who use the agency come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

The service is freely available. However, people are asked to make a contribution towards the running costs of the CSR, but it is emphasised that anyone who is not in a position to contribute is equally welcome to use the service. While the service is not exclusive to church members, it is reasonable to assume that most people will have heard of the service through their church. Publicity of the service is sent through the clergy mailing system which includes diocesan licensed workers and church social workers. Some church notice boards display information regarding the service and provide contact numbers so that people can make the initial approach themselves.

Counselling in a Pastoral Setting

It seems appropriate at this juncture to specify what is meant, in this study, by counselling in a pastoral setting. The pastoral care of people has traditionally been

the domain of clergy. The argument that this task is becoming more difficult within a postmodern culture and the contention of the definition of pastoral care, and its connotations, is taken up by Clinebell [1987], Jacobs [1990], Pattison [1993], Lyall [1995], and Goodliff [1998]. While an analysis of the various perspectives of pastoral care would be interesting, the exercise is beyond the scope of this dissertation and unnecessary for the purpose of the study. Briefly, pastoral care is the spiritual ministry underpinning the minister's work which involves the routine official tasks of baptising, marrying and burying; of visiting the housebound and the elderly, of leading worship and preaching [Lyall, 1995]. Confession and absolution, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, may all be part of the pastoral relationship [Oliver, et.al. 1997]. At the simplest level pastoral care includes the befriending and mutual sharing of concerns which happens in many congregations. Increasingly lay people are setting out to acquire the listening skills to enable them to share more effectively in this ministry of pastoral care [Lyall, 1995].

Although pastoral ministry has been influenced by the increasing role of secular counselling in society, and there are areas of overlap, pastoral care and counselling are not the same. While all ministers are pastoral carers, they are not all counsellors. Similarly, although many counsellors recognise and can enable their clients to explore spiritual issues, this does not make them ministers [Oliver, et.al. 1997].

The Diocesan Counselling Service is provided as one of the many aspects of the ministry of pastoral care. The faith of the counsellor is reflected in care for and sensitivity to all the client's needs and concerns, including the spiritual. There is no explicit use of Christian resources in the counselling process. The counselling relationship takes place within a pastoral setting and may include spiritual and

religious dimensions as part of the counselling process, but not always.

Aims of the Study

The central theme of this study is to explore clients' experience of counselling in a pastoral setting. The focus of inquiry is to ask clients, in the framework of a semi-structured interview, the following questions:

- * Why did you choose the Diocesan Counselling Service?
- * How was counselling helpful?
- * How was counselling unhelpful?
- * What significance has the experience of counselling had on your life?

The aim is not to propose any 'universal truths' about client's phenomenology but to explore the experience of a small number of clients in an attempt to gain more understanding of the counselling process. The study is based within the qualitative research methods which characteristically uses natural language both as data and in representation of results; reports on subjective experience is accepted as legitimate data; typically works with a small number of participants; and emphasises discovery more than verification. These particular characteristics distinguish qualitative methods from traditional, positivist methods of research drawn from the natural sciences [McLeod, 1995, 1996].

The lack of research offering detailed perspectives on clients' experiences of counselling in a pastoral setting has been discussed. Therefore, the literature review summarises key themes that are evident in the wider literature on clients' experiences of counselling and psychotherapy. The research design of the study is then discussed and includes the provisions made to increase the trustworthiness of this research. The methods section follows and describes the sample and setting of participants taking part in the inquiry and how the data was collected and

analysed. The ethical considerations and the limitations of the study are examined and, finally, the results of the interviews are presented and discussed.

In an attempt to simplify communication in this dissertation only one pronoun is used rather than 'he/she' or 'him/her'; in most references the counsellor will be female and the sex of the client will alternate. The terms counsellor or therapist and counselling or therapy are interchanged to introduce variety, not to make a distinction, as is the various language used to denote the people who took part in the study, that is client, participant and interviewee. The Diocesan Counselling Service is often referred to as the Counselling Service, or simply the CSR [Committee for Social Responsibility] by people in the community, therefore it is reflected in the work, particularly by the participants.

Literature Review

The central theme of this study is to explore client's phenomenological experience of counselling in a pastoral setting. My literature search resulted in a negligible amount of appropriate material concerning pastoral practice and none specifically exploring the client's view of pastoral care or of counselling in a pastoral setting. As I have mentioned there has been some growth in the publication of studies into pastoral practice in the United States, for example, Richards & Bergin [1997] and in Britain, Oden [1992] and Lyall [1985], but these publications are not specific to clients' experiences. Therefore, the literature focus is a review of the main themes that are evident in the wider literature of client's experiences of counselling and psychotherapy.

The research literature in this field shows that a variety of different research methods have been used to study the client's experience of counselling and psychotherapy, including written journals of counselling sessions, tape-assisted recall, interviews and questionnaires. Also, a variety of experiences have been studied: counselling as a whole, specific counselling sessions and moments in sessions; a wide range of different types of clients receiving different types of counselling. As McLeod [1994a] asserts, this diversity makes it difficult to arrive with confidence at general conclusions about the nature of the client's experience of counselling. Therefore, the following discussion must be treated circumspectly. No attempt has been made to summarise the conclusion of individual studies; the aim has been to identify themes and observations which are found in more than one piece of research. Following the analysis of Maluccio [1979], the client's experience of counselling and psychotherapy has been divided into three broad phases: becoming a client, the middle phase and ending. These phases will be

discussed in turn.

Becoming a Client

Maluccio [1979] also calls this phase 'getting engaged', but the experience of becoming a client, the beginning phase of counselling, begins long before the person first meets her counsellor. When people are in pain or despair, feel upset or frightened, confused and uncertain, the urge to talk can be strong. A pressure builds that only talk seems able to relieve [Howe, 1993]. The person entering counselling may have previously tried to solve their problem through the assistance of friends or family. Oldfield [1983] found that most people in her study had at one time talked seriously about their emotional difficulties with someone in a formal capacity.

Maluccio [1979] also found that most clients had access to a variety of formal and informal 'helping' agents but as these were perceived by clients as inappropriate or inadequate, they then approached an 'official' agency or an agency that they saw as more appropriate to their individual needs. The study revealed that in most cases the person's distress, usually coupled with some encouragement from another person, propelled them to seek counselling. In a few cases, the client was so desperate or overwhelmed by the problems that they went to the agency even though there was opposition from friends or family [e.g. 'My parents thought you should solve your own problems ... they were negative towards psychiatrists and counselors.' Maluccio, 1979:54].

Mayer & Timms [1970] and Oldfield [1983] found that many of the clients they interviewed had not confided their problem to anyone else, even though there were such people available. It is suggested that the western culture of individual self-reliance, rather than dependency on others, often make it difficult for people to seek

help; and they may feel embarrassed or ashamed about being a client [Mayer & Timms, 1970].

Studies reveal that people entering counselling have often tried to get help before, and in approaching a professional counsellor expect a different quality of assistance [McLeod, 1994a]. Interviews carried out by Maluccio [1979] clearly show that the client's early contact with the counsellor is one in which the helper is being heavily evaluated as a potential source of assistance. He particularly noted the frequency with which clients offered evaluative comments regarding the counsellor's competence. Positive comments of counsellor competence were: 'knew what she was talking about'; 'had put it all together'; and 'seemed to know when to ask a question'. Negative comments were: 'didn't know much more than I did'; 'not capable'; 'not professional'; and 'disorganised'.

However, clients' notions about what constitutes competence can be at odds with the assumptions of their counsellor. Mayer & Timms [1970] write about the 'clash in perspective' between clients and their counsellors, reporting that the dissatisfied clients they interviewed had been looking for expert diagnosis, advice, recommendations and action to resolve the problem.

The client's first impressions of place, person and practice have a critical bearing on her willingness to proceed. The speed of response; the friendliness of the response; an understanding reaction and a willingness to listen indicate whether the counsellor and the agency are likely to understand and appreciate the client's emotional state [Oldfield, 1983; Howe, 1993]. Several people in Oldfield's [1983] study specifically mentioned the atmosphere of the agency and how the manner of the receptionist contributed to their experience as a whole. For example, 'the friendliness of the whole place', and 'I was received and greeted in the most

discreet fashion' [Oldfield, 1983; 86-87]; and a client remarking on her first meeting with her counsellor, 'it's difficult to go to a stranger and talk to somebody, but she did everything in her power to relax us and she was very good at that' [Maluccio, 1979: 59]. Howe [1993] argues that if people experience their surroundings as unfriendly, inhospitable and demanding, their attention is directed outward rather than inward. The client will be intent on protecting herself rather than opening up, and she will talk defensively rather than creatively. Most clients describe their emotional state in the first session in terms such as 'tense', 'anxious' or 'nervous'. However, because the client is not yet sure of the counsellor, this level of distress is often not revealed during the first meeting [McLeod, 1994a].

In the initial counselling session a great deal of client-counsellor activity is directed toward a decision as to whether or not they should 'get engaged' [Maluccio, 1979]. Reaching a working agreement is a vital part of the process. This is achieved by discussing expectations of each other, assessing need and appropriateness of the service, defining the length and frequency of sessions, confidentiality, payment and so on [Maluccio, 1979; McLeod, 1994a]. Maluccio [1979] reports that clients are especially helped by the counsellor's careful review of their discussion and conclusions toward the end of the initial session and gives evidence that when this kind of 'contract-forming' does not take place the client may feel confused and rejected, and can therefore be unwilling to return for another meeting.

While first impressions are important in encouraging the client to make the first step into a therapeutic alliance, the client also needs to feel accepted by the counsellor, her feelings have to be allowed and acknowledged [Howe, 1993]. It is interesting to note that when counsellors are asked to recall the first session, they tend to mention the problems and issues which were presented. But when clients are asked the same question, they remember the feelings they had and their reactions

to the helper [Maluccio, 1979].

Warmth and friendliness are perhaps the most basic therapeutic responses. Dinnage [1989] reports that clients expect some warmth and comfort from their counsellor and when this is not received they are unlikely to proceed. Clients mention warmth and friendliness repeatedly as a major factor in their assessment of the help given [Howe, 1993]. 'Gentle', 'kind', 'understanding', 'made me feel comfortable', 'cared a lot about me', 'warm and lively', 'casual', 'relaxed', 'easy-going', 'friendly', 'pleasant', 'easy to talk with', are just some of the positive comments made by clients about the qualities of their counsellor in Maluccio's [1979] study and which he defines as empathy and genuineness.

Oldfield's study supports these appreciated characteristics, adding 'someone warm, but calm and objective'; 'not imposing on the client, but quite open and willing to contribute thoughts and ideas' [1983; 71]. When warmth and friendliness are absent, the client's opinion is harsh; 'detached', 'cold fish', 'didn't relate to me', 'didn't seem to care', 'too nice', 'phony', 'mechanical', 'businesslike' [Maluccio, 1979] and 'I was hurt by the cold professional manner', 'I would have liked some warmth, a cup of tea', 'I was very angry about the situation and with the counsellor', 'the professionalism seemed very unbending' [Oldfield, 1983:77].

The process of empathy and the client's belief that the counsellor can appreciate how she feels about things, together with the construction of a contract, determines the decision to 'get engaged'. The phase of becoming a client seems to culminate in what Maluccio [1979] has called the experience of 'establishing an emotional connection'. This is when the counsellor's response to the client showed that they were tuned into the client's feelings and concerns and that they had deliberately focused on these at some point during the initial session. This experience seems

to mark the transition between evaluating the counsellor, and finally deciding to work with her. This can be summed up by the words of a client in Maluccio's [1979:62] study: 'It was like we had always known each other ... even though I had never met him before ... some kind of bond grew between us'. Once this happens, client and counsellor are ready to enter the next stage.

However, Maluccio [1979] reports that in some cases, the prospective client agreed to go on even though they were dissatisfied with the worker and/or the initial encounter because the person's distress or pressure from external sources was so strong.

The Middle Phase of Counselling

It is necessary for the counsellor and client to develop an emotional bond and to have some agreement over how they are going to work together [Maluccio, 1979]. When the beginning phase is successfully completed there is clearly a lot happening in the middle phase of counselling, and much of the time it is all happening at once. From the research literature it is difficult to capture in words the sense of what this experience is like as a whole for clients. However, three central aspects of the client's experience at this stage can be identified: the experience of self, the experience of the relationship and the experience of significant or helpful events.

The Experience of Self. McLeod [1994a] identifies three elements in the experience of self in the middle phase of counselling: exploration, discovery and change. The client's experience of self is powerfully affected by the relationship with the counsellor and by the helping process. But, it also seems that, for most clients, the middle phase of counselling is a time when the focus of their attention is fundamentally on themselves. Howe [1993] argues that while some therapists

emphasise changes in behaviour and relief of symptoms as the main indicators of success, clients place the accent on insight and understanding as the most appropriate measure of satisfaction. Although many of the benefits of counselling can be achieved through the release of feelings and the acceptance and understanding shown by a counsellor, making sense and finding meaning tend to come only after the deliberate examination and exploration of the self.

Counselling sessions provide an opportunity for inner exploration. Reflexivity, in which the client monitors and evaluates his own thoughts and feelings and the understandings that might emerge out of such reflections, are regarded as the core activity of counselling [Howe, 1993]. Rennie [1990, 1992, 1994a, 1994b] has presented a number of analyses of Interpersonal Process Recall interviews conducted with clients soon after they had emerged from a counselling session. He argues that reflexivity is the fount of intentionality. Thus, the act of turning attention to themselves enables clients to attend desires and to make decisions about which ones should be expressed in action, and about how it should be done.

Rennie [1990] writes that once this process starts, clients increasingly have a sense of being on a path, or 'track', or train of thought related to the problem; they are in pursuit of meaning. Oldfield [1983] found that clients wanted different kinds of response from the counsellor at this point. The quietness of the counsellor allowed some clients to follow their own train of thought, unimpeded, but in other cases the silence had become a problem and a distraction. For others the prompting and reflecting skills of the counsellor are helpful in enabling them to keep track [McLeod, 1994a]. However, clients seem to be aware [in retrospect] of when the conversation has shifted from their track on to one defined by the counsellor [Rennie, 1990]. Oldfield [1983] is in no doubt that most clients were wanting help with understanding and managing their feelings so that they could solve problems

themselves. Rennie [1992] also observed that within the client's self-awareness they had a sense of what was right for them.

Rennie's [1994b] study revealed that one way in which some clients explored a train of thought was through telling stories about situations that happened some time before the counselling session. He uses the term 'narratives' to describe these stories and argues that the subjective experience of telling a story is a therapeutic experience providing emotional relief, a way of dealing with inner disturbance and serves as a medium for productive thinking carried out privately. When clients are prepared in principle to enter into the disturbance, clients may use a story to delay the entry. Alternatively, telling a story may provide the client with a vehicle for exploring difficult experiences, to re-engage with troublesome feelings, and stimulate new thoughts and ideas as they struggle to make sense of what has happened.

Stories may also be designed to impress the counsellor. What the counsellor hears is the story, but there is usually more going on than is being told. Whatever the motivation for telling a story, once engaged in it, clients experience catharsis, self-reflect extensively and often silently, and frequently contact the inner disturbance whether they intend to or not [Rennie, 1994b].

From Rennie's perspective the experience of being a client at this stage in counselling is one of following tracks, some of which are put into words and some of which are not. Reflexivity, provides the client with an opportunity for changing direction as she follows various paths of personal meaning. However, Rennie [1990, 1992] points out that too much reflexivity leads to inaction, while too little reflexivity leads to action without direction. It is through reflexivity that clients set the stage for change. When the client has been able to assimilate new feelings

and understandings, there is a sense that the self has changed, and this experience can be marked by feelings of confidence or pride [McLeod, 1994a].

Thus, the experience of self in the middle phase of counselling is characterised by exploration, discovery, self-reflection and change. Of course, all this is taking place within the context of a relationship with a counsellor and is dependent on the quality of that relationship.

The Experience of the Relationship. The importance of the quality of the relationship is one of the strongest themes to emerge from studies of client's experience of counselling or therapy; it is of central concern to most clients [Maluccio, 1979; Oldfield, 1983; Howe, 1993; see also McLeod, 1994a]. Studies reveal that clients perceive the relationship with their therapist as 'vivid, mutually receptive, liberal and open, and mutually affirming,' which is very encouraging for counsellors. However, other clients have described the relationship as 'courting a therapist who is seen as rejecting', and experiencing the relationship as 'mean and attacking' [McLeod, 1994a].

Oldfield [1983] was quite clear that the clients she interviewed were emphatic about the essential qualities of this relationship, and their need to trust it totally, while struggling to understand feelings. She quotes one of the clients who said, 'I think the most valuable part of the series of sessions was the gradual formation of a relationship' [p.171]. Oldfield [1983] gives precedence to the emotional quality of the relationship, which is confirmed by other studies [Maluccio, 1979; Howe, 1993]. Carkhuff [1969] concludes that there is a positive relationship between the outcome of therapy and certain qualities of the therapist, particularly empathy, genuineness and 'nonpossessive warmth'. Maluccio [1979] reports that in response to questions such as 'What was most helpful?' most clients and workers initially

responded with a general reference to the relationship. Some of the most commonly mentioned qualities of the worker include: understanding, caring, trust, friendliness, human [p.137]. Howe [1993] argues that for many clients the ideal relationship contains both love and work, empathy and analysis, security and exploration. However, Dinnage's [1989] study reveals the problem of dependence that is ever present as the attractions of the relationship take over from the purposes of therapy.

It seems that clients do not expect counsellors to always be highly accurate with every response; they are prepared to forgive mistakes made by the counsellor. Clients appraise sessions as a whole and tend to be content if one or two highlights can be achieved [Rennie, 1990]. Howe [1993] observes that such a tolerant attitude is more likely if a good working relationship has been achieved, but an inaccurate response within the context of a poor client-counsellor alliance adds further proof that the counselling and counsellor are not working. In this situation energy is diverted from pursuing personal concerns to a preoccupation with the relationship and how to manage it. On occasions clients clearly feel that they and their counsellor are not on the same wavelength at all. Maluccio [1979] reports that when clients are dissatisfied with the service they refer to workers qualities in negative terms, such as: 'she didn't seem concerned', 'didn't know what I was trying to say', and 'she listened ... but didn't do anything else'.

As previously discussed Rennie [1998] characterises the client experience in general as one in which the person is often aware of much more than they choose to communicate to their counsellor. This calls into question the notion that counsellors have an accurate perception of their client's experience of the counselling process. One of the main themes that emerged from Rennie's [1994a] research was that of the client's deference to their counsellor. It was found that

clients did not necessarily voice what they were actually thinking and feeling about their counsellor's work, especially when the counsellor was focusing on an issue, or using a technique, that the client found uncomfortable. At times, some clients would appear to co-operate with the counselling process even though, in reality, they were suspicious of it. Oldfield's [1983] study supports this with one client reporting that she produced things just to fill the silence in order to please the counsellor, 'I felt that the counsellor was wanting me to say things, but I didn't know what they were. I would gladly have said them' [p.77].

Rennie's [1994a] research identified a range of reasons for such deference: the notion from clients that the counsellor was an expert who should not be challenged; the need from clients to give a good impression; clients felt that they should give their counsellor some 'air time', especially when the client has dominated the session; clients do not trust the path they are on, and need to trust the judgement of the counsellor who is the expert; clients are afraid of criticising the counsellor because they do not want to hurt the counsellor's feelings and could possibly jeopardise the relationship.

The quality of the counselling relationship is of central concern to most clients, and given the security of a trusted relationship clients are forgiving of counsellors mistakes. A strong theme that has emerged from studies of the client's experience of the relationship in the middle phase of counselling, is that counsellors do not necessarily know what is going on for the client in the counselling process. Clients are not always honest with their counsellor for fear of disapproval. While counsellors are seen as expert and helpful, they are also someone who misses the point.

The Experience of Significant or Helpful Events. A reasonable amount of research

has focused on what the client experiences as helpful or as hindering. The most frequently mentioned factors that clients believed to be helpful in the study by Murphy et.al. [1984] were: encouragement and reassurance; talking to someone who understands; getting advice from the therapist; the instillation of hope; self-understanding. Other studies have arrived at similar conclusions [for example, Mayer & Timms, 1970; Maluccio, 1979; Oldfield, 1983; Howe, 1993]. There is some evidence that the experience of catharsis or emotional release is also frequently experienced as helpful by clients [Mayer & Timms, 1970], and Llewelyn [1988] found problem-solving was most frequently reported as helpful. Oldfield [1983] writes that the overall picture, built up from what clients say that they have found useful, is of quite strenuous, thinking work, rooted in empathy.

Lietaer & Neirinck [cited in McLeod, 1994a] studied clients' perceptions of what hindered progress in their therapy. Clients felt that things went badly when they did not co-operate with the therapist by being silent, by talking superficially or by not daring to talk about some things. Problems in the relationship between therapist and client were seen as a hindrance and clients found it unhelpful when their therapist made interventions that took them off their own 'track'.

Another source of disappointment and frustration, mentioned by clients in Oldfield's [1983] study, was the absence of advice from counsellors. As McLeod [1994a] suggests, perhaps one of the most intriguing findings is the perception by many clients that advice from their therapist is highly valued, and the absence of advice is seen as unhelpful or uncaring. However, there appears to be a difference between what clients experience as advice and the way that a therapist would perceive the same intervention.

It seems that there is a certain amount of agreement between various studies of

what clients find helpful or unhelpful in therapy and that what they find helpful are general processes such as 'having someone to talk to', 'an accepting atmosphere', or 'getting advice' [Oldfield, 1983; Howe, 1993].

To summarise findings of the research into the client's experience during the middle phase of counselling is difficult. The strongest theme to emerge is that the quality of the counselling relationship is *all-important*. The revelation of client's deference to their counsellor is particularly worth noting. There is also a strong theme of self-directed self-exploration in the middle phase of the counselling process, when clients want different kinds of response from their counsellor. Clients have a strong sense of what is right for them and want to solve their own problems. There is clearly a lot going on in the middle phase of counselling and it can be a very challenging and difficult period for clients. As Maluccio [1979] suggests, the key task is that of *staying* engaged in the therapeutic process.

The Final Phase: Ending

There are several different ways in which the counselling relationship comes to an end. Termination may be mutual; it may be planned or impromptu; it may be decided by the client, the counsellor or by an outside agency and it may be in response to success or failure [McLeod, 1994a].

Maluccio [1979] quotes a number of clients who have experienced successful counselling as expressing feelings towards the ending as: 'it was a traumatic experience', 'I felt like losing a lifelong friend' and 'it was like losing an arm you no longer needed'. Most clients in Maluccio's study, especially those who experienced a planned ending, expressed their feeling openly and directly about termination, discussing themes such as emotional investment and dependence on the counsellor, ambivalence about ending and an awareness of impending loss of

support. Timms & Blampied [1985] found that one aspect of ending was that, towards the end, they began to find the sessions more 'social' and that the client began to take more interest in the counsellor as a person rather than as someone playing a professional role.

Maluccio's [1979] study found that cases in which ending was unplanned, that is the client withdrew, clients ended either because they felt that they had got what they were looking for or because they were dissatisfied with the service. In some cases there was evidence of lack of openness between counsellor and client and lack of clarity or agreement in respect of their roles, goals and expectations. He also reports that clients who had found less benefit in therapy and who experienced unplanned endings were more likely to deny having any feelings about ending. Other studies reveal that clients were surprised or aggrieved, or angry, when counselling had been terminated when it had, and reported feelings of 'unfinished business' and feeling 'let down' by the counsellor or agency [McLeod, 1994a].

The lack of inquiry into exploring the client's view of counselling is highlighted in the short literature review on clients' experiences of ending the therapeutic alliance. This is a fascinating area for further research. As Maluccio [1979] argues, becoming disengaged is in some ways more complicated than becoming engaged.

Conclusions

It seems that counsellors or therapists learn to accommodate themselves to their role; they accept the experience of a stranger disclosing to them. For clients the role is a new one, and often their sense of what might happen or what should happen is very unclear. Research reveals many ways in which the client's experience is hidden from, or different to, that of the therapist. It also suggests that

there exists a deep ambivalence even in clients who see themselves as benefiting from therapy [McLeod, 1994a].

Maluccio [1979] suggests that research into the client's experience may be useful for clients themselves. One interviewee told him that the research interview helped her to gather her thoughts and therefore make more sense for herself of what her therapy had actually meant.

The studies reviewed suggest that although there are commonalities in the experience of different kinds of counselling, there are also some real differences [McLeod, 1994a]. Maluccio [1979] asserts that counsellors underestimate the impact which the rest of the client's life has on the changes which may appear to be associated with therapy. The counsellor's experience of the client is mainly of someone whom she meets in a room perhaps once a week; the client's experience is of a life in which therapy plays its part, but only in relation to everything else.

I am very aware that some of the material cited in this review is now comparatively old, for example Mayer & Timms [1970] and Maluccio [1979]. It will be interesting to see in this study if there have been any changes in clients' experience of counselling considering that the credence of counselling has significantly increased over the past twenty years.

Research Design

The central theme of this study is to explore the subjective experience of people who have received counselling. My proposal is to produce in-depth, authentic accounts of individual experience; if too many informants take part it will be impossible to do justice to their contribution in the research report. Also, a large scale study is beyond the scope of this dissertation especially taking account of the necessity of transcribing tape-recordings of interviews. Therefore, this research focuses on four people who have recently received counselling.

To engage in this type of research I needed a discovery-oriented methodological approach that would allow me to remain close to the data and to describe my learning with the minimal of interpretation, but that would also provide rigorous analysis. I therefore adopted a phenomenological research approach, which is placed within the field of qualitative research, the purpose of which is to accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding [Lincoln & Guba, 1985]. My intention is to open up an area of individual, personal experience, not to arrive at a once-and-for-all definition of it. A phenomenological approach would aim to achieve an authentic and comprehensive description of the way in which counselling is experienced by a client [McLeod, 1996].

Qualitative research is based in a 'social constructionist' perspective on knowledge [Gergen, 1985], which assumes that, in the area of social and psychological inquiry, there is no fixed external reality to be objectively known but a changing social reality which is subjectively constructed. An implication of this philosophical position is that qualitative research does not claim to produce 'universal' truths or scientific laws, but to strive to build meaningful 'local knowledge' [McLeod, 1996].

In contrast quantitative research methods comprise of measurement and analysis of variables using tests, rating scales, and questionnaires which are then interpreted by statistical analysis of the data [Barkham, 1996]. Quantitative methods would not have captured the essence of the language and subjective experience which provides the data used for analysis in this study. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis do not generally form definite stages of the research but will often move back and forth between data gathering and analysis, deliberately using the analysis of early data to guide the choice of new participants or settings [McLeod, 1996].

Phenomenological research is one of the main schools of qualitative analysis that uses data based on informants' written or spoken accounts of their experience. The task of the researcher is to immerse herself in this material until the 'essence' of what it means, its essential meaning, becomes clear [McLeod, 1996]. Although phenomenological research is sometimes identified with other descriptive and qualitative approaches, it differs from them because its focus is on the participants' experienced meaning instead of on descriptions of their overt actions or behaviour [Polkinghorne, 1989].

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study with only a framework of questions put to the participant in an attempt to 'bracket off' my assumptions and attitude toward the phenomenon [Polkinghorne, 1989]. My aim was to stay close to the interviewees' feelings, thoughts and actions as they broadly related to the focus of inquiry. My intention was to try to understand more about the clients' experience and to describe the findings with the minimum of interpretation. The Person-Centred approach to counselling underpins my work as a counsellor and the similarities with this philosophy and phenomenological inquiry are complimentary. I am well placed as a researcher in this method.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by myself, in an effort to immerse myself in the material, and included everything that was spoken by the participant including gestures and non-verbal communication. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used because it is well suited to the purpose of this study and has proven essential to rigorous analysis [Lincoln & Guba, 1985]. 'Units of meaning' were identified from the transcripts and classified into category headings. Further refinement allowed for the development of 'rules for inclusion' which stated as a proposition, reflected the essential meaning contained in the original data [Maykut & Morehouse, 1995]. These procedures contributed to the 'audit trail' available to myself and others in following the process from my initial ideas to the research outcomes [Lincoln & Guba, 1985].

Provisions for Trustworthiness

The procedures for data collection and data analysis presented in this study include several elements that increase the trustworthiness of my research findings. I have identified and described the purpose of the study and explained the selection of the sample. By employing the constant comparative method of data analysis I have a permanent audit trail [Lincoln & Guba, 1985] of my research. This includes my research journal, the original interview transcripts and field notes, and the unitized data. I discussed my research ideas with colleagues and my research supervisor before and during various stages of the study in an effort to reduce personal bias and to provide a certain level of objectivity. These people were able to walk through my audit trail periodically, raising questions of bias. Lincoln & Guba [1985] use the term *member checks* to refer to the process of asking research participants if what they have said has been accurately described. In this research participants were asked if they wanted to see the written transcripts but all declined.

Methods

Sample and Setting

The research population consisted of all the people who had received counselling through the Counselling Service. Adopting the strategy of random or stratified sampling [McLeod, 1995] would involve contravening confidentiality of clients and various other issues discussed in 'ethical considerations'. Also, random or stratified sampling would not necessarily turn up participants who would be willing to take part in the study and, as the researcher, I had no knowledge or control regarding the research population as a whole. The focus of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of clients' experience of counselling. A purposive sampling method was chosen for selecting people. This approach acknowledges the complexity that characterises human phenomena and the limits of generalisation. I chose to select only typical cases because inquiry into atypical cases is beyond the scope of this study [Maykut & Morehouse, 1995]. My aim was to interview four or five people. I preferred to advertise for willing participants and include those clients who had recently [less than a year] finished counselling.

Initial requests for participants in the study were published in the 'Readers Letters' page of five 'free' newspapers that covered the Diocese of Chester. 'Free' newspapers were used to ensure a wide circulation and requests made in the form of a 'letter' incurred no cost. Only one person responded who unfortunately did not fulfil the criteria for taking part in the study. Over a period of five months a total of three requests were published in the same newspapers, with only one further enquiry from a person who, after further information, decided not to take part in the study. These letters can be seen in appendix 4 and 5. During the same period of time requests for participants were published in the Chester Diocesan News

[appendix 6 and 7] which is circulated throughout churches. Again, there was no response.

At the same time letters [appendix 8] were sent to all the counsellors of the CSR asking them to give a written request [appendix 9] to each client after their final counselling session. Counsellors were reminded not to inform their client of the project at the beginning of the counselling contract and to assure their client of complete confidentiality. The client would contact me direct and their counsellor would have no way of knowing that they had taken part. This approach produced one participant. As a last resort the Director of Counselling wrote personally to people who had most recently finished, or were about to finish, their counselling contract asking for their help. Again, the letter [appendix 10] simply gave the outline of the study and the potential participant was able to contact me direct. The Director would have no way of knowing who had taken part. This approach produced three participants.

The participants were all women who either stated or suggested they were Christian. They had all been counselled by a CSR counsellor. The time spent in counselling ranged from 3 months to 5 years. Their ages ranged from mid twenties to late forties. One participant had completed counselling some time ago and the others were about to end the counselling contract.

Data Collection

The aim of the study was to focus on clients' subjective experience of counselling. These individual experiences were likely to be very detailed and personal. Employing a highly structured interview schedule would be time consuming in the preparation, would be the focus of the interview and stifle conversation, especially if all the questions needed to be asked [Maykut & Morehouse, 1995]. Alternatively,

an unstructured or open-ended interview would facilitate the expression of the interviewee's experience but not necessarily address the particular interest of the researcher [McLeod, 1995]. My aim was to explore the interviewees' responses to a small number of key questions. Therefore, I decided to use a semi-structured interview technique which would offer a flexible structure for obtaining information that would be relevant to my focus of inquiry [McLeod, 1995].

The duration of the interviews averaged two hours, were tape-recorded and later fully transcribed by myself. Informed consent was granted by each participant both verbally and written [appendix 3] for the tape recording of the interview and for the details to be used in the study. The interviews took place in the participants' home as this was both convenient and possibly less threatening for them. Also, there was less chance of the interview being confused with a 'counselling session'. My counselling skills were drawn upon in order to create a comfortable atmosphere during the interview.

At the commencement of each interview the interviewee was informed of the objectives of the study and the following questions were put to them as a guide to focus their thoughts:

1. Why did you choose the CSR for counselling?
2. What can you tell me about your experience?
3. How was it helpful or how was it unhelpful?
4. What significance has the experience of counselling had on your life?

As the interview progressed an effort was made to be as non-leading as possible while doing what was felt to be necessary to help the participants represent their experience. Counselling skills were drawn upon in order to check out my understanding of what was being said and to monitor the relevance of the

information being collected [McLeod, 1995].

Data Analysis

The outline of the research design has been discussed. My main concern was with accurately describing what I understood from the interviews. To achieve this some selection and interpretation of the data was required in order to present what was understood into a 'recognisable reality' [Strauss & Corbin, 1990].

The recorded interviews were fully transcribed and included everything that was said and gestured between the interviewer and interviewee. The constant comparative method of analysing the data was utilised which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. This method of analysis is closely related to the grounded theory analysis devised by Glaser & Strauss [1967] who aimed to develop a form of research that would allow theoretical statements to be clearly 'grounded' in experiential data. From their point of view phenomenological research, which restricts itself to description rather than model-building, did not go far enough. On the other hand, traditional quantitative methods impose pre-decided categories and variables on the data, and thereby forego the potential to generate new concepts by listening closely to what informants have to say about their experiences [McLeod, 1996].

Grounded theory studies use observational, documentary or transcribed interview data, to which the researcher applies a systematic step-by-step analysis [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]. Applying the constant comparative method of analysis, units of meaning were identified from the transcribed interviews and as each new unit of meaning was selected for analysis, they were compared to all the other units of meaning and subsequently categorised and coded with similar units of meaning.

Four distinct stages, depicted by Maykut & Morehouse [1995; 135] were followed for this analysis:

- *Inductive categories coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories.
- *Refinement of categories.
- *Exploration of relationships and patterns across categories.
- *Integration of data yielding an understanding of people and settings being studied.

A 'propositional statement' [Lincoln & Guba, 1985] was written that was a general statement of fact contained in the categorised data. The rules of inclusion were then made distinctive and served as the basis for including [or excluding] subsequent units of meaning [data]. These finalised rules of inclusion became the research results. The rules of inclusion [appendix 11] indicated particular themes and were subsequently grouped together into three main headings: The Counselling Service, The Counselling Relationship, and The Counselling Process. These are discussed in more detail in the Research Outcomes section.

Ethical Considerations

While it is impossible to design ethically neutral research every effort was made to validate the trustworthiness of this study. Ethical considerations vary according to the type of study. In qualitative research, the process of gathering detailed accounts of the subjective experience of the person involves developing a close relationship with the participant, and encouraging them to talk openly and honestly about themselves [McLeod, 1995]. From the outset my main consideration for the study was to do everything possible to ensure the well-being of the participant. My counselling skills were drawn upon to create a comfortable atmosphere in the research interview. I tried to be as non-leading as possible while doing what I felt

to be necessary to help the participants represent their experience.

Permission to carry out the study was granted by the Director of the Counselling Service. A letter explaining the design of the project [appendix 1] was sent to all the counsellors on the team and a meeting was held for further discussion. I felt it was important that my colleagues should be well informed of the procedures, after all, it was their clients who would be disclosing their experience of counselling. Counsellors may feel anxious or threatened by such a study. While the identity of the client's counsellor would not be sought, and any references made would be deleted, it was acknowledged that I may recognise the counsellor during the interview. The possibility of the accusation, by a client, of professional misconduct of a counsellor was also discussed. I felt that while it was not my responsibility to report any such accusation, I did have a responsibility to the client to inform them of the BAC complaints procedure [BAC 1993].

In validating the trustworthiness of the project, and in particular, considering the well-being of potential participants in constructing the sample [McLeod, 1995], I rejected the idea of writing directly to all the people who had used the counselling service for a number of reasons: confidentiality of the service would be contravened if names and addresses were given to a researcher; a personal request may evoke past issues that could be distressing; the letter may be opened by another family member which, again, could be distressing; there is an element of coercion in a request made from the agency in which the client has received counselling; and counselling experience that had taken place some time ago may not be as clear to recall as a more recent experience.

Construction of the research sample has been discussed in the 'sample' section. People contacted me directly and were given general information about the project

and details of the interview procedure by telephone. A letter [appendix 2] confirming these details, including confidentiality and complaints procedure, was sent to the participant so that they were fully informed and could withdraw at any time.

When the interview took place the management of the tape recording and written transcripts of the interviews were fully discussed. It was made clear that the recording of the session would only be heard and transcribed by myself and that any references that may lead to the participant's identity would be deleted, although words or phrases of the participant may be used in the main body of the project. The participant was informed that the Counselling Course's staff, the External Examiner, as well as myself, are bound by BAC Codes of Ethics and Practice [BAC, 1993] with regard to confidentiality and that after examination the transcript would be taken from the main body of the project and kept with me. The project would then be made available for public scrutiny. A consent form [appendix 3] was signed by both researcher and interviewee, a copy was given to the interviewee and a copy is held in my possession.

These strategies for maintaining confidentiality form a significant part in validating the trustworthiness of the research project and moreover, when the research participant can see that the researcher is doing everything possible to protect confidentiality, then they will be more willing to be honest and forthcoming in the information that they disclose [McLeod, 1995].

I was well aware of the potentially distressing nature of the interviews and my counselling skills were drawn upon to conduct the interviews in an appropriate manner ensuring as much as was possible the emotional safety of the person. However, I also realised that I had to put aside part of my 'self-as-counsellor'

[Etherington, 1996] to do this. As Etherington argues, on the one hand, without my counselling skills I may not have achieved the depth and qualities of interviews, and I may have caused damage. On the other hand, it was difficult at times to listen to participants recall some poignant details without exploring their feelings and challenging their blind spots and assumptions.

Limitations of the Study

A lot of time and effort was required in getting people to participate in this study, arranging interview times, the actual interview and the hours and hours of transcribing the tape-recordings. The whole research was a long process and there was a danger of losing focus and motivation.

There was difficulty in getting people to take part and the initial plan of advertising was unsuccessful; therefore I had to resort to the Director of Counselling making contact with people personally. This action would have the potential of bringing up some of the issues discussed in the ethical considerations section. People may have felt obliged to take part after receiving a request from the Director. Only some of the research population were contacted and the personal bias of the Director was imposed here. It would have been interesting to have someone who had had a 'bad' experience of counselling.

I recognise that this is a small scale study, and cannot be accepted as an evaluation of the Diocesan Counselling Service. However, the intention was not to provide 'universal truths' but to gain some understanding of the experiences of four people who had received counselling. Perhaps the outcomes of this study can form the basis of further research that could lead to a more formal evaluation process. After all, research based systems of accountability are essential if

counselling is to maintain its credibility [McLeod, 1995].

I also recognise that this research is not specific enough. Although in-depth semi-structured interviews are a wonderful way of collecting rich and authentic accounts of experience, an immense amount of complex data is produced and it is difficult to present it in an effective manner.

My personal bias has already been noted. I work as a counsellor for the Diocesan Counselling Service which provides a motivation for understanding the counselling process from the client's view. It can be argued that any research is ultimately subjective, but I am aware of the importance of not allowing my own opinions to influence the data. In acknowledging my personal bias I can attempt to minimise it.

Research Outcomes

Summary of Interviews

The focus of this study is the phenomenological experience of people who have received counselling in a pastoral setting. The transcripts of the four interviews have been analysed and thirteen category groups are identified with their corresponding rules of inclusion. These category groups with their rules of inclusion can be seen in appendix 11. What clearly emerged from the category groups was the significance of the counselling service itself, the importance of the relationship between client and counsellor and issues that revolved around the counselling process. Therefore, the thirteen category groups are classified into three sections which illustrate the research outcomes:

***The Counselling Service**

- Christian Context
- Initial contact with the Counselling Service
- Flexibility of the counselling contract
- Payment for counselling
- Clients would recommend the Counselling Service

***The Counselling Relationship**

- Qualities of the counsellor
- Feeling safe and comfortable
- Feeling accepted

***The Counselling Process**

- Relief to talk
- Dealing with feelings of anger
- Working in-between counselling sessions
- Gaining insight
- Significant life changes

The analysis of the interviews is presented accordingly. The category groups and their corresponding rules of inclusion are used to present the results. When part of a transcript is cited, a letter followed by a number identifies its source. For example, B:5 refers to interview B, page five of the transcript. Within the transcript [...] is used when the interviewee has paused, or is hesitant, or is struggling to find

the right word. When the interviewer's question has been used this is identified by larger font. Each category name and rule of inclusion are presented in bold type.

The Counselling Service

Christian Context.

Clients value counsellors who include the spiritual, religious, Christian dimension in the counselling process.

The importance of having a Christian Context included in the counselling process was reported by all the participants. The significance of the spiritual, religious and Christian aspect of the counselling process was by far the most reflected on in the interviews. Having received counselling from secular agencies, some participants reported that this did not answer all their questions. They realised that it was important for them to experience counselling within a Christian context.

A:1 although at the time I also went to Relate as well just for an initial appointment and having attended that I decided that that was not what I wanted ... I wanted somebody who was a Christian I wanted somebody who had Christian values and I wanted somebody who would have the gift of belief and wisdom ... the gift of God's wisdom

B:1 the emotional therapy [previously experienced] obviously helped me tremendously and healed me but it didn't answer all those questions about its place within a Christian context and I think my search consciously since my husband died was for that

Participants reported overwhelming feelings of guilt over past issues and needing 'forgiveness' and understanding about their feelings of anger and resentment. They saw this as an important part of the counselling process and felt these issues would be better discussed with a counsellor who was a Christian rather than someone who was a non-Christian who may give conflicting advice.

A:2-A:3 after having been away for so long from God ... I had a lot of guilt ... I needed forgiveness as well ... and that was quite an important element within the counselling ... was the sort of ... a reminder really of a loving and accepting God who does forgive completely and is totally accepting and I suppose that is reflected in the way the counsellor talks with you and respects you and is there

C:11 I just thought that if I went to someone who was a non-Christian I might get conflicting advice... a person who was a Christian was able to say "that's O.K." [feelings of resentment and anger etc.] ... "a Christian is a human being" [laughs] and that was helpful you see ... a person with the same background of values and beliefs

One client said she felt safer going to a counsellor who was a Christian because only another Christian would understand the difficulty and confusion she was experiencing regarding her feelings of anger and resentment.

C:10 I think really I felt safer doing that [approaching CSR] than going to somebody who wasn't [connected with church] because ... well I know they are trained counsellors [from G.P. surgery] ...and that they are very good ... but I did really want it to be in the context of a Christian ... a Christian ... I did want that

C:10-C:11 I didn't really feel that I could claim to be a Christian and say I was feeling all this if the other person wasn't a Christian ... and that's what I think is hard for Christians ... it's hard having those feelings [anger and resentment] because you're a Christian ... I think ... I just felt guilty for feeling like that ... I shouldn't be feeling

Praying alone or with the counsellor during, or at the end of, the counselling session, or being prayed for, was reported as being an integral part of the therapy. For one client having a special service dedicated to her healing and being anointed with oils by a minister was very significant to her progress.

A:2-A:3 ... and you know she prayed with me as well as did the minister prayed for my forgiveness as well as my healing ... it's very difficult actually to imagine how I actually would have got through those very very very tough times ... without it

D:7 we would always end with a prayer ... I think she would instigate it and I certainly wasn't averse ... it seemed to calm me down ... it seemed to round the session off ... it was a nice kind of closure ... it helped me go out into the world again ... I was able to get the bus back without worrying that I might break down in front of the bus driver or something ... it just felt natural [the prayer] there would be a little bit of a sum-up ... there would be the prayer ...

A:2 at the end of each of the sessions with the counsellor we were able to pray together ... which was wonderful and ... she set up a special private meeting with another minister who ... because I was feeling very hurt and damaged ... to actually set up a session to pray for my healing and to anoint me with oils and take communion together ... and that was absolutely marvellous ... that was a really special ... I mean obviously she picked a certain person that she knew she could trust and that was very beneficial for me ... you know I continue to remember that time ... she came with me as well ... so there were the three of us and I continue to remember that particular time

One client disclosed her belief that the Bible provides guidelines for action and explanations for problems, and being able to discuss and reflect on certain aspects of the scriptures with a person who has knowledge and insight was very important in her progress.

B:2 but at the same time I think what is also important is that if perhaps I'm seeing something from scripture that is not ... because of her [counsellor] greater knowledge

of scripture ... she can somehow show me that perhaps I'm not seeing it quite straight ... you see what I mean ... it's that balancing thing ... she was able to help me in my misunderstanding or to confirm my interpretation ... either to confirm it or to sort of 'shift' it slightly ... and that is so reassuring for somebody who is so ... you know ... I instinctively doubt and question totally ... always ... so yes that's been very important to me

All the participants spoke to some degree about their acceptance of a divine agent, that is, God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit, or 'somebody else always there', which facilitated inner healing. The counsellor was seen as a kind of 'stepping stone' towards God, somebody working hand-in-hand with God.

B:5 only last week ... I didn't search for it ... and the pain was overwhelming and it was just absolutely pure ... pure pain ... it wasn't anything else and I just howled ... and it's not about being self-indulgent or anything like that ... it was just pure ... but then ... once one actually acknowledges that reality of pain and asks for Jesus' help ... peace does come and one finds a way of actually reconciling it ... counselling was in a Christian context ... that's what it is all about actually

A:3 I feel that I have been healed by the power of the Holy Spirit ... and by the power of God ... I've been nurtured and looked after until I'm whole and I've been able to stand up and make a new life

B:5 and of course there are times when I still panic ... there are still mornings when I'm beside myself and I don't know where I'm going ... but increasingly now I'm beginning to feel the need to just put my trust totally in God ... but it is a very hard thing to do ... all of us ... you want to have a stepping stone don't you? [counselling] ... or somewhere ... I'm too human to think that I can totally be in isolation

A:5 she [counsellor] could see that and again it's her hand in hand with God really ... healing me and enabling me to understand fully what was happening

C:10-C:11 and that's what I think is hard for Christians ... it's hard having those feelings because you're a Christian ... I think ... I just felt guilty for feeling like that ... I shouldn't be feeling that ... God should be giving me the strength ... and yet ... in a way He was ... I mean I think He was giving me the strength because I wouldn't have got through what I got through without the strength

One participant epitomised counselling as a commitment to looking at reality while at the same time working towards the Truth of God.

B:2-B:3 and all those people who don't go to counselling and don't know what it's about and think that you're going to be given all the answers ... they've got it so wrong ... because it's bloody hard work [laughs] ... it is very hard work ... I mean I see it as a commitment to looking at reality but also working towards the Truth ... but that is within ... it has connotations for Christians of course ... and all of that
And when you say the Truth?
of God ... the Truth of God ... absolutely ... working towards the Truth of God ... without doubt really ... I've got nothing more to add really

Participants maintained that having 'hope' enabled them to enter and stay in counselling thereby facilitating positive change. The following extract shows that 'hope' is clearly part of this woman's Christian faith:

B:6 perhaps it doesn't even have to be spoken [hope]... it just has to be ... it can be conveyed in body language or whatever ... but I suppose if you are a Christian anyway you have that hope ... that is part of being a Christian ... but I don't think its useful to be taken down into despair

and this client disclosed her feeling of hope for her future after accepting God's intervention regarding her troubled marriage:

A:3 I was scared of loosing the marriage ... I desperately wanted to save my marriage and I did everything I felt I could to save it and I actually reached a point in the counselling where ... we agreed ... sort of I needed to be prepared to put the marriage on the altar so to speak ... and be prepared that God may take it away from me ... which was a thought that when problems first began to happen I couldn't face that thought at all ... but I did ... and then it was amazing really because then when ... when it became clear that the marriage was over ... although obviously it was incredibly painful ... I could accept it ... and not only that but I had hope for my future ... because ... at the height of it ... it was very difficult to imagine a life without a marriage ... it was very comforting to me ... and I had hope

One participant who had previously received what she termed 'emotional therapy' summarised the 'felt sense' I had from all the interviews that they benefited from attending to the 'wholeness' of themselves, that is the physical, emotional and spiritual self.

B:4 [emotional therapy] I obviously needed some way of understanding what was happening to me in a very ... almost clinical way ... because it seemed more real I suppose... my gradual experience [of a Christian counsellor] has been one of putting it together ... reconciling it ... the spiritual side ... the emotional side ... well every aspect of humanness ... the wholeness of it ... I think it's useful in coming to an understanding to separate it all out ... like a filing cabinet ... but I think ultimately it has to be seen as a whole

Initial contact with the Counselling Service.

The Counselling Service is initially recommended to clients by Ministers, Vicars or someone who has personal experience of the Service.

Only one participant in the study had vaguely heard of the Service. The other

participants had the service recommended to them by their Minister or Vicar, or by a friend connected with church. Two of the interviewees initially contacted their Minister who provided some regular time to listen and assess their situation and later recommended the Counselling Service. Another Vicar was a friend of the client's family and after spending some time talking together suggested that professional counselling would be a better option. Although one participant had vaguely heard of the Service, it took a friend who had used it to encourage her to make the initial contact.

A:1 as a result of that I actually contacted the Minister and having not been to church for 7 years I actually started to attend his church and to talk to him and it was actually him who recommended the Counselling Service

C:2 a friend who had used the service suggested I ring the Diocesan office ... which I did

B:1 I didn't really choose it [CSR] in actual fact ... because it happened in a panic situation ... I was given her name [Director of Counselling] by the Vicar ... so it sort of happened rather than anything else

Flexibility of the counselling contract.

People are comforted, feel in control and experience a sense of freedom with a counselling service that accommodates individual needs and adapts to changing circumstances.

People felt in control and experienced a sense of freedom when their individual needs were accommodated. Individual needs included being able to travel to the counselling venue by public transport and being able to see the counsellor in the evening. This means that the matching of counsellor and client had taken account of geographical locations and the hours of work of the counsellor.

D:1 and the lady I saw lived a few miles away from here ... which was great because it was outside my own sphere of influence of where I live ... but close enough ... not having the use of a car at the moment ... I was able to get there quite easy on the bus

D:1 and even though she preferred not to work in the evening ... she was quite happy to adapt to the fact that I was working ... and saw me straight from work ... she was very flexible ... which I found very comforting ... that somebody was prepared to help me that much ... that they were prepared to be that flexible

Every participant discussed the significance of being able to make decisions regarding the number of counselling sessions. The fact that the counsellor had no time limit on the number of sessions and accepted that the client wanted 'breaks', allowing the client to renew contact with her directly and to decide when to end the counselling contract, was reported as being very helpful and very freeing.

A:6 it's interesting when I hear from CPNs [Community Psychiatric Nurse] that I work with, talking about contracts ... of six sessions or whatever ... and I don't ever remember having a conversation that consisted of numbers ... that was very freeing for me

A:3-A:4 and it was done on a very informal basis ... because initially I can't remember quite how often I saw her ... maybe once every 2 or 3 weeks and then a gap ... I could contact her [counsellor] if I wanted to see her ... and I hit a couple of 'dips' ... and was able to contact her and see her again

A:7 because I've read about the theory of saying goodbye to the therapist and people finding that very very tearful but the way I've been allowed ... the freedom I've been given means that there hasn't been that sort of wrench really ... its just been allowed to close very naturally ... and I'm sure thats her [counsellor] skill really

It was important for one woman that her needs were met when she was able to get an appointment immediately with a counsellor from the Counselling Service. She said she was desperate to see someone and her alternative was to be put on a waiting list at the G.P. surgery

C:3 so then he [G.P.] said he would arrange for me to see somebody and somebody rang up fairly swiftly but there was a 6 week waiting list and it was then that a friend who had used the service suggested I ring the Diocesan office ... which I did ... I couldn't even speak to anybody properly because I was in such a state ... but the same day somebody rang back and said I will see you in 2 or 3 days ... so thats how it started and I wish I'd done it earlier actually

It may be unusual for a counsellor to see a couple for counselling then continue counselling with one of them. However, for one client this was precisely what was needed and she found it very beneficial that her husband attended some of the sessions.

A:4 and I think it was very important because obviously she fully knew my situation and my circumstances and I wouldn't have wanted to try and explain it all again to somebody else and fortunately because my ex-husband attended some of the sessions she actually got to meet him and see at first hand how he was and the issues around our relationship really ... which was incredibly helpful ... which was such that would have been quite difficult to just explain to somebody and that's not just my words her

perception as well was that she found he was quite an unusual man and it was incredibly beneficial that she met him

The matching of counsellor and client is an important issue on many levels but the issue of gender in certain circumstances is particularly significant.

D:8 at the time she [counsellor] was ideal for the situation I was in ... and the Christian Service knew very little about the background of why I wanted to go ... they obviously knew a little bit ... enough to know that I didn't go to a male counsellor ... but the person that was chosen was chosen from that point of view was perfect ... I would not have opened up to a male counsellor in the same way I did with this lady ... I think it was pure serendipity that I ended up with who I did ... and I'm very pleased that I actually went

The following statements epitomise the value participants place on a Counselling Service that can be flexible in accommodating individual needs.

A:4 it [counselling contract] was totally geared towards my needs and I felt very in control

B:9 and it is also important that within the diocese and within the church or cathedral context that there is the possibility of that flexibility ... outside of this there isn't that flexibility available ... well there is if you are paying privately ... but in the NHS there isn't that flexibility ... so I think if we are talking about counselling within the diocese ... that it is a very important thing to recognise ... that they can give that sort of help ... if they can financially continue to do that because it's very important

Payment for Counselling.

A freely available Counselling Service is valued by people in financial difficulty.

Participants did talk about issues regarding payment for counselling. For some people paying for a private counsellor was not an option, and counselling through the NHS was not immediately available. That the Counselling Service was freely accessible was highly valued; an important factor in the decision to take up counselling.

D:1 ... and because I didn't have much money at the time it was also an unbiased body who wouldn't charge me or charge a nominal fee if I could afford it ... and at that point in time that's what I needed

A:5 and the other thing about the service is that at that point I was actually financially snookered ... although I was in paid employment I didn't have full access to my finances and it was so important and so helpful that it was optional about how I could pay ... or that I could give a gift in the future... if I'd have had to pay I wouldn't have been able to go

Clients would recommend the Counselling Service.

People believe in the value of the Counselling Service and would recommend it to others, and/or would like to 'give something', because they have personally benefited from the experience.

Participants revealed that the actual interview had given them the opportunity to reflect on their experience and in doing so had realised the importance of the Counselling Service. In fact, one of the reasons they offered to participate in the study was a sense that they 'could give something back' by helping with the research.

A:8 I wanted to really express how important and how beneficial it had been to me and I wanted to be encouraging about the work and I would want the work to continue because I can see just how important it is ... and I would have no hesitation in recommending somebody else to use the counselling service

D:4 and I personally would recommend the Counselling Service to anybody because they've certainly helped me ... and if I could go back I would but work being as it is I can't guarantee making the sessions ... but I would definitely recommend the Service

The Counselling Relationship

Qualities of the Counsellor.

A counsellor who demonstrates understanding and reveals 'human' qualities' is valued by clients.

Participants expressed the benefit they found in interacting with 'a real human being' rather than facing a blanked faced 'professional' counsellor. While it was difficult for people to express in words what was meant by 'professional', hand gestures and body language gave a clear message of the image of someone who was separate and remote. Participants expressed how good it felt when their counsellor shared aspects of their own life with them. Having counselling sessions in the counsellor's home was confirmation that they were in a relationship with another human being who had to deal with normal everyday family situations and problems.

A:7 *I did feel very much that this was not some sort of ... [gestures with flat of hand facing her own face and brings it down the length of her body, suggesting an invisible barrier between us] well I can't do that on tape ... sort of blanked faced individual just sitting there reflecting, paraphrasing 'well thats very interesting' and 'how do you feel about that' ... that wasn't happening at all... it was two people interacting in a relationship and she would make references at times to her own situation and her own family ... and that felt really good ... I liked that and it wasn't my perception of how a typical counselling situation would be ... I felt very much I was interacting with another human being*

The sense of a loving relationship between client and counsellor came across very clearly during the interviews. Individuals spoke about the love they felt for their counsellor and the need for counselling to be done with love.

B:8 *she [counsellor] doesn't come across as a 'professional' [emphasises stern gesture, sitting up very straight, raising shoulders] she comes across as somebody who is very loving with deep understanding of humanity*

D:5 *[recalling feelings toward her counsellor] I suppose ... not quite love but ... agapae? ... a familial love I think ... somebody who is very familiar ... almost like an old sweater you've had for donkeys years but because it's so warm and cosy and brings back lovely memories of a nice warm fire ... you keep ... it's almost that sort of feeling I used to get ... a sort of warm glowing feeling that was sort of winter in front of a hearth ... this wonderful feeling of contentness ... yes ... just happy to sit and be ...without anything else having to happen*

Feeling Safe and Comfortable.

Feeling safe and comfortable, being supported by and trusting the counsellor are significant aspects of the counselling relationship.

Participants expressed how important it was for them to feel safe and comfortable with their counsellor. Having somebody to talk to outside the immediate situation who provided support and comfort in distressing circumstances contributed to the loving relationship previously described and enhanced the therapeutic alliance.

A:11 *that process of being supported up to the point where I reached ... it was just after I put the relationship on the alter ... that it then broke and all the planning to go ... so I had to be supported to reach that point where I could do that ... that trust... that if it was going to be taken from me [the relationship] it was actually going to be the best thing ... which I couldn't see ... so that was a very very significant part of the time really*

B:2 *and it's that [the counselling relationship] which has helped me without overloading my family or overloading friends ... it's just allowed me to ... I mean I've never stopped work or anything like that ... right the way through from the time [husband's name] died ... so that I feel if I hadn't have had that support in its various stages ... I think ...well ... I'm not quite sure where I would have been*

Feeling Accepted.

Feeling respected, accepted and not being judged by the counsellor are encouraging and valuable aspects of the counselling relationship.

All the interviewees expressed that they felt complete acceptance by their counsellor. Whatever emotion they presented was gently handled which encouraged clients to express their true feelings.

C:12 she created this environment for me ... and it was O.K. ... even though I felt dreadful and probably made her feel dreadful [laughs] ... it was O.K. to feel like that ... it was O.K. to cry ... a huge relief

A:8 I felt she was totally trusting ... I had no concerns about confidentiality whatsoever ... and I found that she accepted me as I was ... some sessions I would be very very stressed and very very upset and very low and she would handle that every time ... just as she did at other sessions when I would be more positive

D:5 I was just able to be myself ... you know ... I have to put on this act of the professional at work ... or I've got to put on an act of ... I'm this that or the other in the pub or what have you ... if I'd had a lousy week and decided to burst out crying ... all she'd do is hand over a box of tissues and she'd just sit there and wait ... and wait ... it was wonderful ... it was what I needed at the time ... she'd allowed me to put all that behind me

One woman recalled how valuable it was that her counsellor had told her that she liked her.

A:7 it was also valuable because I felt she liked me ... well she told me ... every session we had she would make some ... whether it was consciously or not or whether it would just happen I don't know ... but she would make some positive promotion about me as a person ... or something I'd done ... or a plan that I had ... or an idea ... and that was a very very positive strength ... that really helped me because at the point when I'd gone into counselling my self-esteem was very very low it had been very very damaged and it felt really good to hear her say these things to me ... and to encourage me

My sense was that all the interviewees had felt this from their counsellor. It was evident that receiving unconditional positive regard encouraged and improved clients self-esteem.

The Counselling Process

Relief to Talk.

Knowing the counsellor wants to listen and being able to talk freely about painful and very private issues to someone outside the immediate situation is a relief and very helpful.

The sense of relief that people experienced by talking to somebody who communicated their understanding was very powerful. Participants expressed their surprise, and the benefit they gained, when their counsellor recalled issues from week to week which was evidence that she had listened. By gradually talking issues through, people were able to come to terms with past concerns and begin to cope with present situations.

C:4 talking about all this each week with my counsellor ... and she would make suggestions of what I could do ... helped me manage

D:3 so for me ... someone who is normally quite reserved ... to be able to just talk without somebody stopping me or wondering why I'm gabbling on ... was a great release and that really is what I think helped me the most

C:7 just spending the whole session talking about him was really helpful ... and very beneficial

D:2 and just by gradually talking to this particular lady it helped sought out my own inner mess I think ... and after speaking to her I no longer feel upset about the fact that I'm adopted ... which is a fairly major step forward ... and I certainly no longer feel upset about the fact that I had an abortion ... I now accept that

Dealing with feelings of anger.

Acknowledging and expressing feelings of anger and resentment is helpful because it enables people to 'move on'.

Participants did report the difficulty they had concerning feelings of anger and resentment over their situation. These feelings were unacceptable to the client and caused confusion and guilt. The counselling process enabled clients to work through the difficult feelings, learning to accept them and thereby 'move on'.

B:5 I think one of the most important things was recognising the anger inside me

C:7 I mean I was glad I told her [counsellor] but I still felt guilty ... I still felt that I really shouldn't feel like this [resentment etc.] ... but something did start to happen ...

you know that we are human beings ... we have got these feelings ... we can be angry and resentful and feel guilty ... we are human beings and human beings are like that ... I mean on one occasion I spent the whole session talking about my brother-in-law ... who really made me extremely angry and I blamed him for a lot of things... which was a bit silly really... but I did take on board what I had to do ... that I had to let it go... because it wasn't doing me any good and he didn't know I felt like that

Working in-between counselling sessions.

The effect of the counselling session is not always immediate, clients continue 'working' in-between sessions and after ending.

All the participants discussed how they would recall experiences of a counselling session and how this helped in their self-understanding. After sessions clients would think back about what had been said, or reflected on by the counsellor. People also spoke of how the process impacted on other aspects of their lives.

B:2 and also just single phrases would stay in my mind and allow me to look at situations in a different way ... it wouldn't happen immediately ... I mean [counsellor's name] would say something and I wouldn't necessarily react and perhaps a few days later I would think 'oh it's still there ... come on lets look at it'

C:8 it made me think about a whole lot more about other aspects of my life than just my initial problem ... and I continue to think about things in between the counselling sessions and after I stopped ... it goes on all the time really ... but I mean I don't think about it as much as I did

Gaining Insight.

As the counselling process moves on clients begin to gain more clarity about their situation and begin to recognise, and take responsibility for, their own needs.

Every participant explained how they gradually began to understand their situation, look at things from a different perspective, and begin to make changes in their lives. The outcome for one woman of years of total dedication to her family was the loss of her own identity. Counselling helped her regain her 'self' and recognise her own needs. This theme of recognising personal needs, coming to terms with particular issues, and taking control of events was very evident in all the interviews.

C:8 I think its [counselling] made me realise that I'm me [emphasis] ... not somebody's wife or mother or sister-in-law or daughter-in-law [laughs] I'm me [emphasis] and it's been a long time since I thought that ... I've been totally devoted to

my family ... and I think ... I mean I don't regret that ... that's what I chose to do ... but I think they sometimes give me the message "you're there for me" ... but I had never thought of that

A:11 so I could see really clearly what was happening ... and by Christmas time I had absolute clarity of what had happened all the way through my relationship with him [husband] and I was able to speak to people who I thought I would never have a conversation with ... and I did ... and it just gave me the confidence ... without which it would have been very difficult ... it took time to get to that point where I would be ready and actually wanting to see this picture ... it was a process

Making Significant Life Changes.

Individuals experience increased levels of self-esteem after counselling which leads to significant life changes.

All the participants indicated that making positive life changes were a direct consequence of counselling. People expressed how much happier and self confident they felt after counselling and one person explained how counselling helped her avoid medication and psychiatric care. New hairstyles, career changes, starting university courses, learning to salsa, losing weight, saying 'no' and realising 'I am also me', were reported as being significant life changes. These changes were part of a wider picture of each person beginning to realise their individual potential. While clients were well aware of the reality of their situation, 'we're not out of the wood yet', and 'it still hurts of course', they nevertheless had gained a better understand and 'come to terms' with events. They were all 'moving on', 'climbing out from the bottom of a pit', learning to manage and cope with circumstances and in the process felt an increase in self-esteem and felt respected by others.

D:6 yes ... I got more self-confidence ... I feel happier being me ... yes I have down times ... I don't think I'd be human if I didn't ... but the down times come less and less frequently ... and I can only pinpoint that back to the counselling

C:12 the whole experience [of counselling] has changed me ... or changed the way I cope ... I mean there were times when I would feel physically sick when I was on my way home ... at the thought of coming in here ... wondering what I was going to face ... and I know we've still got a long way to go ... I mean I don't know how we're going to get [husband's name] back to work ... but things don't seem as bad now ... I feel better able to cope

A:6 I am ready now [to finish counselling] ... with all the different legal issues about the divorce being sorted ... and me getting myself sorted ... starting a new course at the end of the month and different things ... it feels as if chapters are closing ... I don't think it ever just happens just like that really ... I think right throughout the year I've been making steps forward into a new life ... and getting stronger all the time

B:5 last week [when I was in pain] at the time I wanted to phone everyone up ... I did in fact phone my vicar ... I phoned [counsellor's name] ... I phoned a friend ... and nobody was there ... and I said 'God just intends that I should deal with this myself' ... and I did ... and he gave me the strength to do it ... and that was an absolute reality ... and to have been given the support [counselling] to realise that is just beyond words

Conclusions

The interviews clearly reveal that the Christian Context of the counselling experience was very significant for these clients. The value placed on accommodating Christian beliefs and values into the counselling process was reflected on, in varying degrees, by all four women. Prayer was accepted as an integral part of the process and the Scriptures were seen as providing guidelines for action and explanations for problems. The belief of God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit was openly discussed and clients saw their counsellor as somebody working with God; facilitating healing and nurturing.

The accessibility of the Counselling Service and the flexibility of the counselling contract was reported as very helpful by all the participants. These aspects contributed to feelings of being in control and providing a sense of freedom.

Participants emphatically expressed the benefit they derived from interacting with a counsellor who was 'a real human being'. Counsellors were reported as being, open, friendly, caring people who provided understanding, acceptance and respect. Clients felt safe and comfortable, and totally accepted, and in the process were able to disclose some deeply held anxieties. The sense of relief experienced by talking, to somebody who showed they really cared, was very powerful and in

the process clients were gradually able to come to terms with difficult circumstances and very painful feelings. All the participants indicated that making positive life changes were a direct consequence of counselling. People reported an increase in self-esteem and expressed how much happier and self-confident they felt after the experience.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

Truly listening to our clients can be a productive and rewarding resource of contributing to the theory and practice of counselling. In the previous section I have presented a summary of four clients' views of counselling in a pastoral setting. By focusing on what they think, I have identified some crucial theoretical issues and derived pertinent practice implications.

This section summarises the main findings and considers their significance for the Diocesan Counselling Service. In doing so, I will highlight issues that aim to contribute to the theory and practice of counselling in general. The presentation is in three parts and follows the same format as the Summary of Interviews. That is: The Counselling Service, The Counselling Relationship, and The Counselling Process.

The Counselling Service

During the semi-structured interviews participants were asked: Why did you choose the Diocesan Counselling Service? This question originated from my thoughts around the notion of the likeness between the counselling relationship and the traditional Christian pastoral relationship and gave rise to the following questions:

- * Do people approach the Diocesan Counselling Service simply because their minister has guided them there?
- * Are counsellors given 'authority' because the clergy advocate the service?
- * Is counselling in this setting used for the provision of 'the hearing of confession'?
- * Do counsellors occupy a place that was previously seen as the domain of priests?

These questions were not asked directly but listening to the participants' experience produced some interesting answers.

The significance of the Christian Context of the Counselling Service was by far the most reflected on by participants. Three of the participants had experience of secular counselling and made a conscious decision of choosing counselling that was provided within a Christian Context. People were looking 'for something more' than secular counselling could provide. The tremendous value placed on the spiritual, religious and Christian aspect of the counselling process was disclosed, in varying degrees, by all four women. When we look at the roots of the modern counselling movement and see that they are deeply embedded in the traditions of the Church's ministry of pastoral care, it is hardly surprising that people will opt for such an agency.

While counselling has been gaining ground for only a few decades, religion is as old as humanity itself. The concepts of conscience, covenant, community, altruism, love, confession, and enlightenment, are so central to religions and have obviously informed counselling theory and practice [Feltham, 1995]. Oden [1992] argues that long before psychology was a distinct discipline, and a forerunner for counselling, Christian pastors and spiritual advisors were engaged daily in activities that required what today is viewed as psychological expertise. Many essential elements of therapeutic care were well understood before the modern period. An ancient Jewish tribe called *Therapeutae* were monks who practised the philosophical art of *Therapeutein*, or healing, and it may be no accident that the Jewish influence on the development of psychotherapy has been so immense, for example; Freud, Adler, Klein, Maslow, Erikson, and many other contemporary therapists are of Jewish descent [Feltham, 1995].

The roots of therapy and ministry are closely intertwined. The Greek word *therapon* [from which the term therapist derives] is one who intimately helps, serves and heals and the Latin translation for *therapon* is *ministerium*, from which the term minister comes. The pastoral care tradition has from its linguistic roots been thought of literally as a therapeutic relationship [Oden, 1992]. Freud also spoke of the psychoanalyst as a 'secular pastoral worker' [Feltham, 1995].

Historically ministry and counselling are linked. Consequently, there are a number of reasons why it makes sense for the Diocese to provide a Counselling Service: the association between pastoral ministry and counselling; it is seen as an aspect of the ministry of pastoral care; the increase in demand for counselling by the public in general; the decline in clergy, which results in a greater work load. In this study, three of the participants had initially approached their vicar with their presenting problem, supporting Maluccio's [1979] and Oldfield's [1983] studies that found most people had talked seriously about their problems to someone in a formal capacity. The vicar had provided some regular meetings for discussion before referring clients to the Counselling Service. It could be concluded that this was because the vicar recognised the need for professional counselling, which he [or she] was not equipped for, or that his [or her] workload simply does not allow for such a relationship. Halmos [1965] has pointed out that the growth of counselling services was increasing at the same time that the population of the clergy was declining [around the 1950s in Britain], and the opinion that counsellors occupy a place in society previously seen as the rightful domain of priests is argued by Oden [1992].

Participants in this study reported that they 'felt safer' going to a counsellor who was a Christian rather than somebody who was not connected with the church. The main reason for this was that they felt that a fellow Christian was more likely to

understand personal conflicts regarding feelings of anger, resentment and guilt than a non-Christian. Religious faith was a very important aspect of life for three participants in particular, and the need for this to be understood, and accepted, by their counsellor, came across very strongly in the interviews. The issue that some religious people wish to have their faith taken seriously and are afraid that it will be undermined by a secular psychiatrist has been explored by Mumford [1987]. These are realistic fears especially when many psychiatrists are assumed to be dismissive of religion. From the psychiatrist's viewpoint the deeply held convictions and religious language of some clients may be seen as part of their problem. Mumford argues the need for psychiatrists to be aware of their own beliefs [whether religious or anti-religious] and to lay them aside during the consultation, attempting to understand the client in the client's own terms without imposing value judgements. His comments are also relevant when potential clients request to see a counsellor who is a Christian. We can be sympathetic towards religious people who wish to see a counsellor who is a Christian because of the fear of their faith being undermined by a secular counsellor. But, counsellors who counsel in a pastoral context need be aware of the unreal, sometimes even magical, expectations which may lie behind such a request [Lyll, 1995].

Overwhelming feelings of guilt over past issues and the need for receiving 'forgiveness' was disclosed during the interviews for this study; they were also reported as being a main reason for contacting a Christian agency. While these issues were not always expressed, it was a theme I strongly sensed. Feltham [1995] believes that individuals' longing to be heard is related to the tradition of confession. Confession means to acknowledge and be acknowledged. Confession might bring relief to a troubled person, while the forgiveness mediated through the priest might help the person to start life afresh [Jacobs, 1990]. The likeness between the counselling relationship and the traditional Christian pastoral

relationship is discussed by Feltham [1995] and a major part of the value of the clergy until about the seventeenth century was their provision of the hearing of confession.

Lyall [1995] argues the need to take account of the belief system of the client regarding the practice of confession. He writes that helping a client 'appropriate, assimilate and share God's love, forgiveness and acceptance' often involves a finely balanced decision, shared with the client, about whether this can be done in the context of the counselling relationship or needs to be referred to a priest for confession and absolution. Accounts from participants in this study reveal that the counselling relationship adequately provided a sense of forgiveness and acceptance. However, for one woman, a separate religious ritual with a priest was *all-important* in her healing. Her comments about this confirm Lyall's [1995] argument:

"... after having been away for so long from God ... I had a lot of guilt ... I needed forgiveness as well ... and that was quite an important element within the counselling ... a reminder really of a loving and accepting God who does forgive completely and is totally accepting and I suppose that is reflected in the way the counsellor talks with you and respects you and is there" [A2-A:3].

Counsellors who work for the Diocesan Counselling Service are well placed to organise such a need for clients.

As can be seen from the Research Outcomes, praying was reported as being an integral part of the therapeutic process. Prayer 'felt natural' and gave comfort to clients, it helped in 'summing up' the counselling session and provided 'something to think about' in between appointments. This insight can be compared with the report by Johnson & Ridley [1992] who recognised that integrating Christian beliefs and practices such as prayer, into the counselling process, can be a powerful

source of hope for the future. Yalom [1980, 1986] has argued that hope can enable the client to enter and stay in counselling, and increases compliance with therapeutic interventions. The instillation of hope is a factor, reported by clients, as helpful in their therapeutic progress [Murphy et al, 1984; Howe, 1993]. I experienced a prevailing sense of hope from all the participants. One woman believed that having hope was part of being a Christian and another revealed that it was through God's help that she was able to accept life without her marriage, and in the process realised that she had hope for her future.

The belief that the Bible provides guidelines for action and explanations for problems was revealed by one participant in this study, as very important to her progress. The use of scriptural truth in the counselling process [Johnson & Ridley, 1992] and interpreting stories, or narratives, told by clients, in the light of religious stories and teachings [Foskett & Jacobs, 1989] have been identified as beneficial to clients. In a secular society it is easy to forget the Bible has been a source of comfort and instruction to millions for centuries [Feltham, 1995]. Oden [1992] identifies textual evidence of the Christian tradition's understanding of the centrality of empathy, congruence and unconditional accepting love as conditions of constructive behavioural change. He argues that the psychotherapeutic process is based on Christian assumptions about worth, love and empathy.

All the participants openly discussed their belief and acceptance of God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit, or 'somebody else always there'. Clients saw their counsellor as somebody working with God, facilitating healing and nurturing. Johnson & Ridley [1992] report that clients benefit from Christian counselling approaches that seek to facilitate inner healing through the acceptance of a divine agent. Theistic world religions teach that there is a Supreme Being who was involved in the creation of the world and who continues to influence the lives of people. They also describe

religious and spiritual beliefs and behaviours as essential for optimal human growth and fulfilment [Richards & Bergin, 1997].

Richards & Bergin [1997] argue that there has been a resurgence of spiritual interest and faith within the American population. This spiritual energy has created a demand for psychotherapists to be more aware and sensitive to religious and spiritual issues. But few are adequately trained to deal with such issues. Richards & Bergin's research revealed that many clients were religious and had spiritual issues that were inextricably intertwined with their presenting problems.

Richards & Bergin's [1997] comments are relevant to this study. The spiritual, religious and Christian aspect of the counselling process was by far the most reflected on by participants. Presenting problems of bereavement, broken marriage, feelings of guilt over past issues were all intertwined with their religious and spiritual self. One participant disclosed her need in counselling was to attend to the 'wholeness' of herself, this included her spiritual self. Accommodating this into the counselling process, resulted in her healing. Hurdling [1992] equates 'healing' with 'wholeness' and in this study there was a clear theme throughout the interviews that the wholeness of clients had been attended to, the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspect of humanness, and in the process healing came about.

This study provides evidence that the accommodation of Christian beliefs and values within the counselling process was instrumental for therapeutic change to occur for these particular clients. I believe their counselling experience could not have been completely successful if their counsellors had not appropriately addressed their Christian beliefs and values. These findings validate Richard & Bergin's [1987] argument regarding appropriate treatment for clients with religious

and spiritual concerns.

The Diocesan Counselling Service is well placed to provide appropriate counsellors for such needs of clients. However, the counsellors have a diverse range of experience, qualifications and disciplines. The 'matching' of client and counsellor is an important process. It is also important to remember that not all clients contacting the Counselling Service will necessarily want to address spiritual or religious issues. Counsellors need to be aware of their own beliefs with the proviso that they should be able to 'bracket off' or suspend these, attempting to understand their clients, without imposing value judgements.

These issues also highlight some implications for the counselling profession in general. There are many people in the general population who hold strong religious views and, as Bergin [1980] argues, there is a danger that therapy may be seen as irrelevant or even damaging. Bergin has carried out a systematic analysis of the differences between what he calls 'theistic' and 'clinical-humanistic' value systems which makes it possible to see that there can be radically different views of what is 'right' or 'good'. Counsellors trained in disciplines that embody clinical-humanistic values, may perhaps lose touch with the religious or spiritual values of their clients. The power imbalance of the counselling situation may make it impossible for the client to assert his values except by deciding not to turn up [McLeod, 1993].

The significance of the flexibility of the counselling contract was reported by all the women in this study. The sensitive and efficient response by the Director to organise counselling for one woman, supports Oldfield's [1983] study that the client's first impressions have a critical bearing on her willingness to proceed. The fact that all the counsellors had no time limit on the number of sessions and were

flexible regarding the issue of ending or taking 'breaks' was clearly very helpful. Clients expressed their feelings of being in control and having a sense of freedom because their individual circumstances and needs were accommodated by their counsellor. This compares with Oldfield's [1983] study where people said they felt there were disadvantages in a system of regular, fixed appointments for an arranged period of time. However, in the same study one participant felt it was a good thing when a limited number of sessions were proposed because, 'I felt I mustn't waste time, I must get cracking' [p. 85].

Timms & Blampied's [1985] study reveals that difficulties in endings occur when counselling ends 'prematurely' or 'too late'. Clients felt unable to ask for counselling to continue when the counsellor had indicated that the ending was near. However, if clients continued with counselling after they had come to believe they need not, they expressed guilt about taking up the counsellor's time. In Oldfield's [1983] study, one client spoke of her anger over early termination but felt unable to express this to her counsellor. This woman felt that the constraining sense of indebtedness arose because she was not paying for the service. This is a very interesting concept in view of the fact that the Diocesan Counselling Service is freely available.

The significance participants placed on the flexibility of the counselling contract raise pertinent issues for the Diocesan Counselling Service. As one participant emphasized, that flexibility in a counselling relationship is generally not available, unless people are paying privately. This situation could place greater demand on the Counselling Service. Flexibility on the part of the counsellor is necessary in attending to clients' individual needs, which is essential to the therapeutic process. Availability of the counsellor, extended counselling sessions and 'open door' endings may be required in providing for the needs of *this* client at *this* time. But,

individual counsellors need to be aware of the demands that such flexibility imposes, as well as the possibility of encouraging dependence. The Counselling Service also need to recognise these demands on individual counsellors who are committed to the Service and give their time freely. For different reasons counsellor's needs are also important.

The issue of payment can also be included in the flexibility of the Counselling Service. While the Service is freely available, contributions are welcomed. In Allen's [1994] personal account regarding payment, she says that making a donation was an important part of her commitment to counselling. Participants in this study did express their gratitude that the Service was freely available because individual financial circumstances did not allow for private counselling and counselling through the NHS was not immediately available. However, the issue of payment does raise some serious questions. Does this system promote client's feelings of indebtedness to counsellors? Did people taking part in this study do so because of feelings of indebtedness? How does the system of payment effect the counselling relationship? These pertinent issues remain open for debate.

The Counselling Relationship

Every participant in this study described the relationship they experienced with their counsellor as one that encompassed trust, understanding, respect and acceptance. Clients expressed the benefit they derived in interacting with 'a real human being' and 'getting to know' their counsellor, rather than working with someone who was distant and remote. They were emphatic about not wanting a 'professional' counsellor. Although it was difficult for them to put into words what was meant by 'professional', body language and facial expressions gave a clear message of someone who was detached and business like. Counsellors came

across to their clients as open, friendly, caring people without pretentious expertise. This supports Howe's [1993] findings that clients tend to prefer therapists who seem to them to have their own personality, sense of humour and particular characteristic 'quirks'.

Counselling sessions that took place in the counsellor's home appeared to contribute to the open and trusting relationship experienced by the women. Feeling totally accepted by her counsellor enabled one participant to 'feel dreadful' and to spend the majority of the early sessions crying. This woman's disclosure that the emotional relief was 'very helpful' and 'a huge relief' can be compared with Mayer & Timms' [1970] study. Feeling safe and comfortable, being accepted, and not being judged by the counsellor were all important aspects of the relationship and set the foundation for a positive therapeutic outcome. These findings are comparable to other studies, for example: Maluccio [1979]; Oldfield [1983]; Howe [1993].

The sense of a loving relationship between client and counsellor was evident during the interviews. Individuals disclosed the love they felt for their counsellor and expressed their opinion that all counselling should 'be done with love'. It was a very valuable experience for one client to feel 'liked' by her counsellor. Acceptance and understanding are elements of love and there is no doubt that clients were deeply comforted by this knowledge. It gave the women confidence, it boosted their self-esteem and it certainly helped them feel valued. Howe [1993] substantiates these findings, arguing that for many people in distress the experience of 'love' is not only necessary, it can be sufficient.

I think it would be expected that a Counselling Service provided by the Church of England is based on Christian faith and love. Halmos [1965] argues that

counselling is an activity based on faith and love, and has taken over from formal religion. He writes that counsellors believe in the power of love over hatred, promote a philosophy of autonomy, and their work is a form of communion. Halmos also argues that 'professionalisation' has proved an excellent camouflage for the counsellor's *agape*, or Christian love. Interestingly, '*agape*' was described as the love one participant, in this study, felt for her counsellor.

The Counselling Process

The quality of the counselling relationship was of central concern to all the participants in this study. This apparently underpinned the therapeutic process supporting France's [1988] argument that the quality of the relationship is unquestionably the most valuable part of the counselling experience. It provides the security and motivation to engage in the more cognitive work in the therapy, and is indispensable for survival during the really difficult times. Clients in Oldfield's [1983] study were emphatic about the essential qualities of the relationship, and their need to trust it totally while dealing with painful issues. Oldfield stresses that the healing agents are more likely to lie in the pervasive and not entirely conscious effects of the counselling relationship and less clearly in the cognitive work that is done.

In this study, clients reported the sense of relief they experienced knowing that someone was interested in them and wanted to listen to their story. Again, these findings support other studies. The opportunity to talk figures highly in what clients find to be most helpful from the therapeutic process. To have the opportunity to talk with someone in an atmosphere of interest, warmth, and tolerance is most valued by clients [Howe, 1993].

In the safety of a warm and friendly, trusting environment, participants felt totally

accepted and in the process were able to share some difficult, painful feelings. This is comparable to Maluccio's [1979] study. He defines these characteristics as empathy and genuineness and that once the client and counsellor have established an emotional connection they are ready to enter the middle phase of counselling.

Participant's accounts clearly show that 'the experience of self' [McLeod, 1994a] was taking place in this middle phase of the counselling process. Acknowledging and expressing deeply held feelings of anger and resentment, and discussing painful and very distressing issues enabled individuals to 'move on'. All the participants revealed 'working in-between sessions' emphasising their commitment to the process. It is evident that the focus was on themselves, which equates with 'reflexivity' [Rennie, 1992], and by turning attention to themselves they were able to attend to their own needs and make decisions based on their own locus of evaluation. There is a clear theme throughout the interviews that clients were exploring their situation, discovering themselves and in the process were able to make significant changes in their lives. The elements of the therapeutic process for these women reflect Oldfield's [1983] observations that most clients in her study, wanted help with understanding and managing their feelings so that they could solve their own problems themselves. Her overall picture of what client's find most useful is evident in this study, that is: quite strenuous, thinking work, rooted in empathy. Gaining insight and understanding was reflected in all the interviews. Howe [1993] writes that this is a main indicator of success for clients.

This study is evidence that it was through reflexivity that the participants set the stage for change, supporting Rennie's [1992] theory. When they were able to assimilate new feelings and understandings, there was a sense that the self had changed, and this experience was marked by feelings of renewed confidence and

increased self-esteem. The revelations of the various life changes are confirmation of a successful counselling experience.

Conclusions

Listening to the client's view of counselling in a pastoral setting has provided some valuable insights for individual counsellors, for the Diocesan Counselling Service and for the counselling profession in general. The significance placed on the religious and spiritual self cannot be underestimated. Participants have provided clear evidence that the accommodation of Christian beliefs and values within the counselling process was instrumental for their therapeutic change to occur.

These findings raise the question of counsellor and client 'matching' and the competence of the counsellor, particularly when it comes to Christian faith and scripture interpretation. The people who work for the Counselling Service are professionally qualified, competent counsellors. But, are there sufficient counsellors equipped to address some of these issues? As I write I have no knowledge of individual qualifications. I think it is fair to say that clients would expect a certain level of expertise from counsellors in this setting. The Diocesan Counselling Service providers need to address the issue of counsellor qualifications, perhaps with a view to training people specifically in pastoral counselling in order to provide the needs of individual clients.

The counselling profession in general also need to be aware of individuals' religious beliefs and values and endeavour to address them adequately. As Lyall [1995] suggests, perhaps we need more counsellors who are both highly competent as counsellors and sensitive to the transcendent and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

However, not all clients want to include religious, spiritual or Christian dimensions in the counselling process and counsellors need to be aware of imposing their beliefs and values onto their client.

This study confirms that the relationship between client and counsellor is *all-important*. The quality of that relationship underpinned the therapeutic process. Counsellors were reported as being, open, friendly, caring people without pretentious expertise. Feeling safe and comfortable, being accepted, and not being judged by the counsellor were unquestionably the most valuable part of the counselling relationship and provided the foundations for a positive therapeutic outcome. Howe [1993] argues that for many clients the ideal relationship contains both love and work, empathy and analysis, security and exploration. These characteristics were very evident in this report. The personality of the counsellor was more important to clients than her techniques, possessing the core qualities of empathy, genuineness and warmth were very effective.

Summing up what participants found to be most helpful in their counselling experience reveals: the chance to talk with someone who shows that they understand them, who is interested in them, who is warm, friendly and genuine. The significance placed on the counsellor's expression of care, openness and acceptance is compatible with my own beliefs. Rather than being led by theory or skills the emphasis is placed on the therapeutic relationship which can provide a safe yet challenging arena for self-expression and exploration for many clients and many different presenting issues.

In this study, individual counsellor's competence and expertise shines throughout participants' recollections of their counselling experience. They are part of a team of people who have subjected themselves to years of intensive training in

counselling and have acquired specialised skills. They are committed Christians who give their skills and time on a voluntary basis. They are a gift to churches and communities. This study demonstrates that they are highly valued by their clients. Every participant said they would recommend the Counselling Service and felt very strongly that such a service be widely available. But, are the counsellors and the work they do sufficiently appreciated by the church? Lyall [1995] suspects that the church is somewhat ambivalent towards counselling and counsellors. I hope this is not so. The church needs to be aware of how important a professional Counselling Service is to the community. Financial support for counsellor training and/or ongoing professional learning are some ways of demonstrating commitment to counselling and dedicated counsellors.

This study began by disclosing my belief that it is only by asking people about their experience of counselling that I am able to learn about the nature of counselling from the point of view of the client. In summarising participants' phenomenological experience of counselling, I offer you a client's view:

when I think of where I was a year ago and where I am now ... it's like two different people ... because I think when you've been in a relationship that's obviously having problems and when your confidence is getting drained away ... and then obviously when we [herself and husband] went through some very very difficult circumstances that we did ... I felt like I was at the bottom of a pit really ... that I couldn't get out ... I actually described to her [counsellor] that I felt like I'd got this massive wound ... initially ... that was just haemorrhaging and I couldn't stop the bleeding ... and then the bleeding stopped but it was still there gaping ... and then as time went by ... and I believe this is the power of God and I believe this is for me the power of Jesus ... that it would close together ... and I said to her [counsellor] that I'd be left with scars and when I had the service with the minister ... healing me ... he didn't know I'd said that [emphatically spoken] ... he said 'even the scars will be healed' [a very long silence] ... so I've been doing all sorts of things ... running a half marathon ... learning how to salsa ... and work have really looked after me ... and I've just been awarded a bursary to take a year out to do a Masters and they [work] are helping with that ... it still hurts of course with the divorce and everything having gone through so recently ... there are papers to sign ... things still need sorting out ... it's still happening... I know there is still a way to go ... but I know where I've come to ... from the bottom of the pit ... and I believe ... I know ... I asked for guidance and Jesus took my hand ... so I could see really clearly what was happening ... and by Christmas time I had absolute clarity of what had happened all the way through my relationship with him [husband] and I was able to speak to people who I thought I would never have a conversation with ... and I

did ... and it just gave me the confidence ... without which it would have been very difficult ... it took time to get to that point where I would be ready and actually wanting to see this picture ... it was a process [A:10-A:11]

Client Feedback ?

In concluding this dissertation I recall the frustrations I experienced in trying to get people to take part in the study. I initially had numerous concerns and questions. Would clients agree to take part? Would counsellors feel threatened by the study? What would clients think of me asking such personal questions? What effect would the interview process have on the participants? Did I have the right to intrude on their lives? What would be the quality of the data that I would collect? Would the data be of any use? Who would be interested in such a study? These questions and concerns made me approach the whole research project with extreme caution.

However, in every step of the research I was met with encouragement and cooperation. The Director of the Counselling Service and my counselling colleagues were very supportive and rather excited at such a project. The initial attempts at getting clients to participate was extremely difficult and frustrating. But, those who did were so very helpful, open and honest in their disclosures about their experience of counselling. My concerns that the interviews may have a negative effect on participants were unfounded. Every person made some comment about the positive effect the interviews had had on them. The interviews helped clients assimilate their experience and it was evident that there were positive consequences for them. In relating their feelings, thoughts and perceptions they seemed to gain personal satisfaction. It was as though their self-esteem was enhanced through participating in the study.

The study also had a profound effect on me as the researcher and as a counsellor. I was able to appreciate the complexities involved in research of this kind. There is a minefield of ethical considerations to take into account, and the time and effort involved requires a certain depth of focus and commitment. I was concerned to

capture the true essence of the participants reflections and to present them with as little interpretation as possible. I gained so much experience about the complexities of the counselling relationship. This may sound odd coming from an established practitioner but, as an observer, I was able to stand aside and put my own values and judgements down. I was invited to observe the counselling process from the client's own view, a rare privilege indeed. I also gained further respect for my counselling colleagues, I was able to appreciate how much they gave of themselves to other people with complex needs and expectations. I know personally that counselling is a demanding occupation and this study reinforces my conviction that professional skills are vastly more complex than the way they are often portrayed in theoretical literature and training.

This experience has confirmed my own beliefs and values regarding the counselling relationship. Having an 'open heart' and accepting people as they are underpins my philosophy. I believe it is a privilege to be invited to share in someone's private world, that is often deeply painful and distressing. I was very privileged that the participants in this study allowed me into their world.

At an individual level, obtaining feedback from each client can serve as a useful device for monitoring our own practice improving our skills. Individual counsellors could obtain clients' views at the end of the counselling contract. If counsellors become more aware of the positive impact they have on their clients, they may enhance their sense of competence. This in turn may encourage them to be more comfortable in their role and change the traditional client-counsellor relationship, in particular shifting the power balance between them [Maluccio, 1979].

The Diocesan Counselling Service can also benefit from a systematic gathering of

clients' views. This could serve as a means of monitoring and evaluating the service providing an essential component for future planning. To achieve these purposes, client feedback should be encouraged to give their views in depth on a variety of issues such as: what they find helpful or not; and how they think the service could be improved. These issues are also relevant to the counselling profession in general. Consumer input is now becoming more established in view of the demands for accountability from service providers.

Despite the limitations of this study, it has reinforced my conviction about qualitative research methods. Some of the details that participants disclosed as they were encouraged to think about their experience would not have come out if a quantitative method was employed. Future research could be strengthened by combining survey techniques with a larger population of clients and qualitative methods with a small subgroup.

In conclusion, client feedback studies are essential to counselling practice and service providers. By truly listening to our clients we may be able to achieve a better understanding of the essence of counselling, from *their* point of view; an understanding that will lead to improvement of services

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M.A. Research Project

Dear

as you may know I am exploring the experiences of clients who come to our agency. I thought you may like some information before our meeting on the 1st June.

The project is designed to explore the experiences of counselling from the perspectives of the participants. There is no specific hypothesis being tested. The focus of my inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of their experience. My aim is to allow participants to discuss what is most important for them, within the context of a semi-structured interview.

Construction of the research sample will be made from people who agree to take part in the study. Requests in local newspapers and church magazines will [hopefully!] bring forth willing participants. These people will be fully informed of the objectives of the study prior to me obtaining their consent. This will also include the procedures that will be implemented to ensure confidentiality of the data, and of their right to withdraw at any time.

I am a member of the British Association for Counselling, and working within its ethical guidelines in conducting this research. I assure you, as I will assure the participants, that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality. Although words and phrases might be quoted directly, no information will be published which might reveal the identity of the participant or their counsellor.

If there are any complaints about the way I conduct my research, I would ask to be contacted in the first instance. People may also wish to speak to my academic supervisor, Dr. Gordon Lynch, who may be contacted at:

University College Chester
Parkgate Road
Chester CH1 4BJ
Telephone 01244 375444

Although this is a small scale study, probably 4 or 5 interviews, it includes several elements that increase the trustworthiness of the project. I also believe that this is research, however small scale, that gives the client a voice.

I would appreciate any comments and suggestions you may have.

Best wishes

Barbara Edge

Counselling Research Project

Dear

thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. As we discussed in our telephone conversation, I have sent you some details of the research for your information.

This research project is designed to explore the experience of clients who have used the Counselling Service provided by the Diocese of Chester. The focus of the project is to gain a deeper understanding of your personal experience as a client. Within the context of a semi-structured interview, which will be tape recorded, you will be asked to share that experience. I expect the process to take between one and two hours. This will provide us with plenty of time to introduce ourselves, set up the tape recorder and give me the opportunity to explain the process and answer any of your questions. I will also explain the procedures that will be implemented to ensure confidentiality of the data, and of your right to withdraw at any time. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview.

As an Individual Member of the British Association for Counselling I am bound by its Codes of Ethics and Practice and subject to its Complaints Procedure. I am working within these guidelines in conducting this research. I assure you that what you tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality. Although words and phrases might be quoted directly, no information will be published which might reveal the identity of you or your counsellor.

If there are any complaints about the way I conduct my research, I would ask to be contacted in the first instance. You may also wish to speak to my academic supervisor, Dr. Gordon Lynch, who may be contacted at:

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In providing a service I believe it is very important that we hear about clients experience. If successful, this project can provide valuable information not only for the Diocese of Chester Counselling Service but for all counsellors, in providing the needs of clients in the future.

Once again thank you for taking part and I look forward to meeting you [date and time of interview]

Best wishes

Barbara Edge

Appendix 3

Counselling Research Project

Consent Form

I, , hereby give consent for the details of an interview involving me and.... BARBARA EDGE.... and a tape recording of that session to be submitted as part of a research project for the M.A. in Counselling Studies at University College Chester. I understand that the recording of the session will only be heard by Barbara Edge who will transcribe the session and delete any references that may lead to my identification. I understand that while my words or phrases may be used in the main body of the project, there will be no reference made to my identity. I understand my right to withdraw my participation and my personal material at any time throughout the research proceedings.

I also understand that, without my further consent, the transcript will be read and seen by Counselling Courses staff for the purpose of assessment and moderation, and by the External Examiner for the course in question, and I understand that all of these people are bound by BAC Codes of Ethics and Practice with regard to confidentiality. I understand that after examination the transcript will be removed from the main body of the project and kept with Barbara Edge. I understand that without my further consent the research project will be made available for public scrutiny.

Signed [Interviewee]..... Date.....

Signed [Researcher]..... Date.....

Appendix 4

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Diocese of Chester Counselling Service

may I, through your reader's letters page, ask people to take part in a counselling research project.

I am currently involved in a research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the Counselling Service provided by the Diocese of Chester.

I am member of the British Association for Counselling and working within its ethical guidelines in conducting this research. I can assure potential participants that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality.

If you are willing to share your experience or require more information, please contact me without any obligation.

Thank you.

B. EDGE

Telephone Contact

Dear Sir/Madam

may I through your readers letters page ask people to take part in a valuable research project?

Can you help?

More people are required to participate in an important research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the counselling service that is provided by the Committee for Social Responsibility.

I can assure potential participants that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality.

If you are willing to share your experience or require more information, please contact me without obligation. Your help will be much appreciated.

Thank you.

Barbara Edge

Telephone Contact

Appendix 6

To: Editor of Chester Diocesan News
Fax.

From: Barbara Edge
Fax. Telephone.

Date:

Dear

I am a counsellor working for the CSR Counselling Service. [colleague's name] suggested I contact you with my request.

As part of my M.A. studies, I am embarking on a research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the Counselling Service provided by the Diocese of Chester. The focus of my inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of their experience. My proposal and method of working has been discussed with the counselling team and is fully supported. The Director of Counselling has given her full approval.

Of course I need willing participants to take part in the project and it was suggested that the Chester Diocesan News would reach a wide circle of people. Could I therefore ask you to print the following as soon as possible. If you think the request needs amending or you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Research Project

I am currently involved in a research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the Counselling Service provided by the Diocese of Chester.

I am member of the British Association for Counselling and working within its ethical guidelines in conducting this research. I can assure potential participants that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality.

If you are willing to share your experience or require more information, please contact me without any obligation.

Thank you.

**B.Edge
Telephone Contact**

Dear

Research Project

as discussed, could you please publish the following in the Chester Diocesan News as soon as possible, thank you.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Edge

Can you help?

More people are required to participate in an important research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the counselling service that is provided by the Committee for Social Responsibility.

I can assure potential participants that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality.

If you are willing to share your experience or require more information, please contact me without obligation. Your help will be much appreciated.

Thank you.

**Barbara Edge
Telephone Contact**

Dear

M.A. Research Project

as discussed at the last meeting, please find enclosed a letter asking clients to take part in the research project.

As you can see I have not provided much detail of the project, the idea being that those who are interested will contact me for further information.

I think it would be appropriate for you to give the letter, in the envelope provided, to your client after your final session together. As we discussed, it would not be helpful to the research if you informed potential participants at the beginning of the counselling contract that this project was taking place. Of course, you can assure your client of complete confidentiality and that you would have no way of knowing that they had taken part.

I have taken up the suggestion that advertising in the Diocesan News would reach a wide circle of willing participants. I hope so! Keep a look out at next month.

At the time of writing I'm sad that I cannot tell you I am inundated with wonderful people wanting to take part in this exciting project. I have had exactly **no** replies to requests in various newspapers! But I'm not giving up yet! I am certain that with your help and the request in the Diocesan News people will soon be yearning to take part!

Thank you for your help and for the support and encouragement that I felt so strongly at the meeting, it meant a great deal to me and is very important to the success of the project. I left the meeting with a warm glow, fired up with enthusiasm for the project.

Again, I would appreciate any comments and suggestions you may have and if you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes

Barbara Edge

Research Project

I am currently involved in a research project that explores the experience of clients who have used the Counselling Service provided by the Diocese of Chester.

I am member of the British Association for Counselling and working within its ethical guidelines in conducting this research. I can assure potential participants that what they tell me will be treated with the utmost respect and with complete confidentiality.

If you are willing to share your experience or require more information, please contact me without any obligation.

Thank you.

Barbara Edge
Telephone Contact

Appendix 10

Dear

I am writing to you confidentially as one who used our counselling service a little while ago, or is still using it, to let you know about a piece of research one of our counselling team, Barbara Edge, is undertaking as part of her M.A. in Counselling.

She is asking simply, whether people found the service helpful or unhelpful in any way and to explain the reasons for their opinion.

The survey would not disclose any names, and neither your counsellor nor I would know whether or not you have responded. There would be no need to mention any of the issues you brought to counselling.

Please do not feel under any obligation to respond. I am writing to all those who came to us in the last year or so.

If you are interested and willing to take part in the research please get in touch with Barbara Edge on [telephone contact]. She will be delighted to hear from you.

Yours sincerely

Director of Counselling

Rules of Inclusions

The Counselling Service

Christian Context.

Clients value counsellors who include the spiritual/religious/Christian dimension in the counselling process.

Initial contact with CSR.

The Counselling Service is initially recommended to clients by Ministers/Vicars or someone who has personal experience of the service.

Flexibility of counselling contract.

People are comforted, feel in control and experience a sense of freedom with a counselling service that accommodates individual needs and adapts to changing circumstances.

Payment for Counselling

A freely available Counselling Service is valued by people who are in financial difficulty.

Clients would recommend the Counselling Service.

People believe in the value of the Counselling Service and would recommend it to others, and/or would like to 'give something', because they have personally benefited from the experience.

Counselling Relationship

Qualities of the Counsellor.

A counsellor who demonstrates understanding and reveals 'human' qualities is valued by clients

Feeling safe and comfortable.

Feeling safe and comfortable, being supported by and trusting the counsellor are significant aspects of the counselling relationship.

Feeling accepted.

Feeling respected, accepted and not being judged by the counsellor are encouraging and valuable aspects of the counselling relationship.

Counselling Process

Relief to talk.

Knowing the counsellor wants to listen and being able to talk freely about painful and very private issues to someone who is outside the immediate situation is a relief and very helpful.

Dealing with feelings of anger

Acknowledging and expressing feelings of anger and resentment is helpful because it enables people to 'move on'

Working in between counselling sessions

The effect of the counselling session is not always immediate, clients continue 'working' in between sessions and after ending.

Gaining insight.

As the counselling process moves on clients begin to gain more clarity about their situation and begin to recognise, and take responsibility for, their own needs.

Significant life changes.

Individuals experience increased levels of self-esteem after counselling which leads to significant life changes.

Rules of Inclusions and Categories

The Counselling Service

Christian Context.

Clients value counsellors who include the spiritual, religious, and Christian dimension in the counselling process.

A:1 although at the time I also went to Relate as well just for an initial appointment and having attended that I decided that that was not what I wanted ... I wanted somebody who was a Christian I wanted somebody who had Christian values and I wanted somebody who would have the gift of belief and wisdom ... the gift of God's wisdom

D:1 I have a strong spiritual feeling and thats why my friend recommended the C.S.R.

B:5 and again I would say I don't know how I would have coped without it being within the context of Christianity ... to give one a greater understanding ... and just the wisdom contained in the bible ... the understanding of oneself gives one the understanding

B:1 so that I'd had experience of what you might call 'non-Christian' ... not specifically Christian ... healing and therapy ... and then what I found in actual fact ... and I can only talk as how I see it ... was that the next time I was in trouble as it were I was extremely tense and I recognised that I need know how to try and relax and my doctor sent me to see a clinical psychologist and I worked with her assistant who actually taught me to relax ... so that was my next stage and it just happened that both of them were Christians as opposed to a 'non-believer' ... do you see what I mean ... and so by the time I got to this next panic stage ... I realised that I'd come to what was a completely Christian ... within a completely Christian context and I think ... I mean ... yes the emotional therapy obviously helped me tremendously and healed me but it didn't answer all those questions about its place within a Christian context and I think my search consciously since my husband died was for that

D:6 she would maybe give me some words that I might like to think about ... or ... just even in the prayer we had at the end ... would get me thinking because she would always be able to pin point the centre of what I'd been trying to discuss in the session and I would then go away and sort of think about that

D:7 I mean sometimes it seemed like advice sometimes it was just the phrasing in the prayer ... not every week but quite frequently something in the closing conversation I would be able to pick up on and think ... yes ... O.K. ... I'm going to think about that ... I mean I'm not sure if the lady herself knew she was doing it ... but it certainly worked for me ... and I'm very grateful for that

D:7 we would always end with a prayer ... I think she would instigate it and I certainly wasn't averse ... it seemed to calm me down ... it seemed to round the session off ... it was a nice kind of closure ... it helped me go out into the world again ... I was able to get the bus back without worrying that I might break down in front of the bus driver or something ... it just felt natural [the prayer] there would be a little bit of a sum-up ... there would be the prayer

D:7-D:8 it [the prayer] did round the session off ... it seemed to calm me down ... it certainly helped ... it didn't make me go to church any more ... but it certainly pinpointed my own spirituality which was quite useful ... and helped me to not feel so alone ... it reminded me that there is somebody else always there ... however much I don't feel they are on occasions ... so it was very useful ... I'm not sure that that particular thing [prayer] would work for most people but I'm assuming that if people go to a Christian counselling service that they would expect some sort of overt Christianity to bring itself forward at some point ... it helped quite a lot ... it's one way of emptying your mind enough to start thinking about the important things ... and that is a very useful tool when you're trying to force yourself to think

about something you don't really want to think about

B:2 but at the same time I think what is also important is that if perhaps I'm seeing something from scripture that is not ... because of her [counsellor] greater knowledge of scripture ... she can somehow show me that perhaps I'm not seeing it quite straight ... you see what I mean ... its that balancing thing ... she was able to help me in my misunderstanding or to confirm my interpretation ... either to confirm it or to sort of 'shift' it slightly ... and that is so reassuring for somebody who is so ... you know ... I instinctively doubt and question totally ... always ... so yes thats been very important to me

B:6 perhaps it doesn't even have to be spoken ... it just has to be ... it can be conveyed in body language or whatever ... but I suppose if you are a Christian anyway you have that hope ... that is part of being a Christian ... but I don't think its useful to be taken down into despair

B:4 and I'm left to deal with it ... which is part of the stepping away actually ... and having the confidence put one's trust in God ... totally ... but as I say its very difficult ... but doing it within the Christian context ... if you're talking about things like that its actually understood

B:4 And if you were to take those things to somebody without a Christian context?

they would interpret it in a different way I suppose ... I needed help in those early stages and I found somebody could see me ... who I went to privately ... and I think at that time it was a physical thing because it was emotional ... I needed that emotional therapy ... because I was in a state of shock those first years ... literally a state of shock for 5 years ... you see when [husbands name] died I hadn't been a church goer as such because we had only just moved here ... but I did turn ... literally ... I thought nobody's going to help me except the church and I literally did turn to the church and was very lucky having [vicar's name] who was just wonderful ... very supportive

B:4 [emotional therapy] I obviously needed some way of understanding what was happening to me in a very ... almost clinical way ... because it seemed more real I suppose... my gradual experience [Christian counsellor] has been one of putting it together ... reconciling it ... the spiritual side ... the emotional side ... well every aspect of humanness ... the wholeness of it ... I think it's useful in coming to an understanding to separate it all out ... like a filing cabinet ... but I think ultimately it has to be seen as a whole

B:9 I just really do think you [C.S.R. counsellors] are so necessary ... since you contacted me I've been thinking that really the priest used to be the centre ... as a Roman Catholic you'd go to confession and he'd give you that listening time ... but of course they were dealing with such small numbers those days and now the numbers are huge and the priest can't cope ... thats why I say you are so necessary ... you are part of the church ... and part of how the parish or diocese is cared for ... so often vicars and curates are not equipped ... it's not to say it's wrong it's that their job is different ... its changed ... they are so busy ... taking part in this project gives me the opportunity of saying thank you

B:2-B:3 and all those people who don't go to counselling and don't know what it's about and think that your going to be given all the answers ... they've got it so wrong ... because its bloody hard work [laughs] ... it is very hard work ... I mean I see it as a commitment to looking at reality but also working towards the Truth ... but that is within ... it has connotations for Christians of course ... and all of that

And when you say the Truth?

of God ... the Truth of God ... absolutely ... working towards the Truth of God ... without doubt really ... I've got nothing more to add really

B:7-B:8 and the fact that we are trying to understand the Truth ... because we both are [counsellor and client] in one sense ... means that we can both say things if we feel

uncomfortable with them ... which I have been known to do ... and [counsellor's name] can as well

B:4-B:5 I think another reason for ... it is part of understanding what the Truth is ... but also because as far as I can see is that pain ... of which we all suffer ... distorts ... that it is not actually placed realistically ... and I think one of my driving forces has been that I have wanted to remain in a loving condition ... and because of the way pain distorts ... I think you only unravel that by actually understanding and acknowledging the pain within it of Christ

B:5 only last week ... I didn't search for it ... and the pain was overwhelming and it was just absolutely pure ... pure pain ... it wasn't anything else and I just howled ... and its not about being self-indulgent or anything like that ... it was just pure ... but then ... once one actually acknowledges that reality of pain and asks for Jesus' help ... peace does come and one finds a way of actually reconciling it ... counselling was in a Christian context ... thats what it is all about actually

B:5 and of course there are times when I still panic ... there are still mornings when I'm beside myself and I don't know where I'm going ... but increasingly now I'm beginning to feel the need to just put my trust totally in God ... but it is a very hard thing to do ... all of us ... you want to have a stepping stone don't you? [counselling] ... or somewhere ... I'm too human to think that I can totally be in isolation

C:11 And I'm wondering if it was actually difficult to say those things to a Christian?

yes it was ... I thought that maybe she [counsellor] would think that I shouldn't be feeling like this ... that it was terrible ... and it did take me a few sessions before I could actually say what I was really feeling

C:10 I think really I felt safer doing that [approaching C.S.R.] than going to somebody who wasn't [connected with church] because ... well I know they are trained counsellors [from G.P. surgery] ...and that they are very good ... but I did really want it to be in the context of a Christian ... a Christian ... I did want that

C:10-C:11 I wonder if you can put into words what you mean by 'feeling safe' within a Christian context?

well ... I think when I said about feeling guilty ... you know ... as a Christian I shouldn't be feeling like this [laughs] ... I shouldn't be feeling angry ... I shouldn't be feeling resentful ... I shouldn't be like that because I'm a Christian [laughs] ... but ... we are also human ...

So when you were feeling all those emotions you were telling yourself that you shouldn't be ... and these messages came from your Christian beliefs and values ... is that fair to say that ... is that what you mean?

yes ... yes ... that's it ...

And you felt that exploring those beliefs with somebody who was not a Christian you thought that perhaps they wouldn't understand your feelings?

yes ... that's right ... absolutely ... I didn't really feel that I could claim to be a Christian and say I was feeling all this if the other person wasn't a Christian ... and that's what I think is hard for Christians ... it's hard having those feelings because your a Christian ... I think ... I just felt guilty for feeling like that ... I shouldn't be feeling that ... God should be giving me the strength ... and yet ... in a way He was ... I mean I think He was giving me the strength because I wouldn't have got through what I got through without the strength

C:11 I just thought that if I went to someone who was a non-Christian I might get conflicting advice... a person who was a Christian was able to say "that's O.K." [feelings of resentment and anger etc.] ... "a Christian is a human being" [laughs] and that was helpful you see ... a person with the same background of values and beliefs

A:1-A:2 as I say the main reason why I selected it [C.S.R.] I wanted somebody with Christian values but also I felt that the situation I was in I needed... I needed wisdom ... I suppose my understanding of counselling has always been around using a lot of reflection and getting the person to make their own decisions and certainly that happened but I think there were times when the nature of the situation I was in at the time ... it was confusing ... incredibly difficult ... and at that time it was incredibly emotional and stressful ... that I suppose it sort of crossed the boundary of ... to say advice it sounds like you are being told what to do ... but it wasn't like that at all ... but ... I mean I approached each of the sessions ... particularly the ones I went to on my own ... really asking God to really speak to me during the sessions ... that I would have clear guidance ... I suppose initially that is what I needed ... I needed to work out why what had happened had happened and how I was going to handle a situation that continued to change for about 6 months ... until it reached a solution point

A:2 I do believe that God can use people to minister to you in a different way ... I was able to ... at the end of each of the sessions with the counsellor we were able to pray together ... which was wonderful and ... she set up a special private meeting with another minister who ... because I was feeling very hurt and damaged ... to actually set up a session to pray for my healing and to anoint me with oils and take communion together ... and that was absolutely marvellous ... that was a really special ... I mean obviously she picked a certain person that she knew she could trust and that was very beneficial for me ... you know I continue to remember that time ... she came with me as well ... so there were the three of us and I continue to remember that particular time ... as I say he anointed me with oil and I continue to remember that time ... the things that he said to me

A:2-A:3 after having been away for so long from God ... I had a lot of guilt ... I needed forgiveness as well ... and that was quite an important element within the counselling ... was the sort of ... a reminder really of a loving and accepting God who does forgive completely and is totally accepting and I suppose that is reflected in the way the counsellor talks with you and respects you and is there ... and you know she prayed with me as well as did the minister prayed for my forgiveness as well as my healing ... it's very difficult actually to imagine how I actually would have got through those very very very tough times ... without it

A:3 I feel that I have been healed by the power of the Holy Spirit ... and by the power of God ... I've been nurtured and looked after until I'm whole and I've been able to stand up and make a new life

A:3 I was scared of losing the marriage ... I desperately wanted to save my marriage and I did everything I felt I could to save it and I actually reached a point in the counselling where ... we agreed ... sort of I needed to be prepared to put the marriage on the altar so to speak ... and be prepared that God may take it away from me ... which was a thought that when problems first began to happen I couldn't face that thought at all ... but I did ... and then it was amazing really because then when ... when it became clear that the marriage was over ... although obviously it was incredibly painful ... I could accept it ... and not only that but I had hope for my future ... because ... at the height of it ... it was very difficult to imagine a life without a marriage ... it was very comforting to me ... and I had hope

A:5 she [counsellor] could see that and again it's her hand in hand with God really ... healing me and enabling me to understand fully what was happening

A:8 I just sensed that I was sitting with a Godly woman [counsellor] with integrity ... that's what I mainly sensed about it

A:10 I actually described to her [counsellor] that I felt like I'd got this massive wound ... initially ... that was just haemorrhaging and I couldn't stop the bleeding ... and then the bleeding stopped but it was still there gapping ... and then as time went by ... and I believe this is the power of God and I believe this is for me the power of Jesus ... that it would close together ... and I said to her [counsellor] that I'd be left with scars and when I had the service

with the minister ... healing me ... he didn't know I'd said that [emphatically spoken] ... he said even the scars will be healed [very emotional crying softly]

B:9 well in fact you have put into a word ... the word healing ... it is that ... I do feel everybody actually needs constant healing ... of the spirit [softly ... crying ... very emotional]... it should be part of one's daily office ... and I don't feel I shall ever say goodbye to [counsellor's name] ... and I think I've still got some healing to be done ... but it is about learning to ... [long silence] ... I've got lost I'm sorry ... I have already said that God has led me to this ... I might have been pushed in the direction initially by [brother's name] ... but I think God has led me through ... well God leads one anyway ... it's just a matter of allowing God to lead one

Initial contact with C.S.R.

The Counselling Service is initially recommended to clients by Ministers/Vicars or someone who has personal experience of the service.

A:5 he [Minister] contacted her [Director of Counselling] initially and I think she was going to get someone else ... but they were off sick ... so she saw me herself

A:1 as a result of that I actually contacted the Minister and having not been to church for 7 years I actually started to attend his church and to talk to him and it was actually him who recommended the Counselling Service

B:1 I didn't really choose it [C.S.R.] in actual fact ... because it happened in a panic situation ... I was given [Director of Counselling] her name by the Vicar ... so it sort of happened rather than anything else

C:1 I had vaguely heard about it [C.S.R.] myself through my connection with the church

C:2 a friend who had used the service suggested I ring the Diocesan office ... which I did

D:1 I had never heard of the C.S.R. ... but a friend of mine is a Vicar and she has had counselling herself ... and she does counselling ... and she recommended the C.S.R. as a very unbiased body who would be able to help me

Flexibility of counselling contract.

People are comforted, feel in control and experience a sense of freedom with a counselling service that accommodates individual needs and adapts to changing circumstances.

A:7 because I've read about the theory of saying goodbye to the therapist and people finding that very very tearful but the way I've been allowed ... the freedom I've been given means that there hasn't been that sort of wrench really ... its just been allowed to close very naturally ... and I'm sure thats her [counsellor] skill really

B:3 it's not quite so easy to cut off is it? [from counselling] ... because ... especially when that relationship [counselling] has gone on for so long ... and I've now got to that stage where I think "I don't want to be counselled anymore ... I'm grown up" [laughs] ... but it is difficult to make that transition and to change it and shift it ... you want to have a stepping stone don't you? ... or somewhere

A:6 and I haven't seen her [counsellor] for a while ... we haven't completely finished it was left open ... because my divorce has only recently gone through ... I wasn't quite ready [to

finish counselling] when I last saw her it was when the decree absolute was just about to go through and I actually felt very very down and so I went to see her ... and I predicted that when the divorce was final I would really hit a major 'dip' again ... and I would need to see her ... and although I did 'dip' when the decree came through I didn't 'dip' as bad as I thought ... so its left open ... but I will see her again ... because I feel I want to bring it to a close now

A:3-A:4 and it was done on a very informal basis ... because initially I can't remember quite how often I saw her ... maybe once every 2 or 3 weeks and then a gap ... I could contact her [counsellor] if I wanted to see her ... and I hit a couple of 'dips' ... and was able to contact her and see her again

A:4 it was totally geared towards my needs and I felt very in control

B:8 it is professional in one sense ... but because we've known each other for so long its not quite as clearly defined as me going for a certain number of sessions ... because its so flexible ... and [counsellor's name] will sometimes give me 2 hours of her time ... which is a long time for something like that

A:6 it's interesting when I hear from CPNs [Community Psychiatric Nurse] that I work with, talking about contracts ... of six sessions or whatever ... and I don't ever remember having a conversation that consisted of numbers ... that was very freeing for me

B:4 I started seeing her weekly ... it was only ever weekly because when it was desperate ... I could phone if necessary ... and sometimes there are months when I feel that I can cope and not worry ... and then suddenly things build up again ... but now we're on a monthly thing

D:8 at the time she [counsellor] was ideal for the situation I was in ... and the Christian Service knew very little about the background of why I wanted to go ... they obviously knew a little bit ... enough to know that I didn't go to a male counsellor ... but the person that was chosen was chosen from that point of view was perfect ... I would not have opened up to a male counsellor in the same way I did with this lady ... I think it was pure serendipity that I ended up with who I did ... and I'm very pleased that I actually went

D:1 and even though she preferred not to work in the evening ... she was quite happy to adapt to the fact that I was working ... and saw me straight from work ... she was very flexible ... which I found very comforting ... that somebody was prepared to help me that much ... that they were prepared to be that flexible

C:3 How long have you been seeing the counsellor?

since April ... weekly to start with ... and then less frequently ... and now I'm having a break

D:5 [weekly counselling sessions] it allowed continuity to keep going ... if it had been once a fortnight or once a month ... the same number of sessions spread over a longer period of time ... I don't think I would have achieved as much as I did ... because there would have been too much of a break in between the actual sessions

B:9 and it is also important that within the diocese and within the church or cathedral context that there is the possibility of that flexibility ... outside of this there isn't that flexibility available ... well there is if you are paying privately ... but in the NHS there isn't that flexibility ... so I think if we are talking about counselling within the diocese ... that it is a very important thing to recognise ... that they can give that sort of help ... if they can financially continue to do that because it's very important

D:1 and the lady I saw lived a few miles away from here ... which was great because it was outside my own sphere of influence of where I live ... but close enough ... not having the use

of a car at the moment ... I was able to get there quite easy on the bus

D:2 I could phone her [counsellor] if I got down

C:1 I couldn't get an appointment at the one recommended at the doctor's surgery ... well I could get an appointment but I had to wait ... whereas when I got in touch with Diocesan House I got somebody to help me the next week

C:5 things were much better and we [counsellor and client] decided we could have a longer time in between our meetings

C:5 I feel now that I can leave it longer in between [sessions] ... I mean I've never had to do that before [have counselling] so it's a sort of surprise admitting to yourself that you actually need to do it ... and it's not easy ... it's hard

D:9 no expectations at all ... she was just there if I needed her ... and if I didn't ... no recriminations ... she would just sit back ... and that's very freeing actually ... I was very glad that that's the way it worked

C:3 so then he [G.P.] said he would arrange for me to see somebody and somebody rang up fairly swiftly but there was a 6 week waiting list and it was then that a friend who had used the service suggested I ring the Diocesan office ... which I did ... I couldn't even speak to anybody properly because I was in such a state ... but the same day somebody rang back and said I will see you in 2 or 3 days ... so that's how it started and I wish I'd done it earlier actually

A:4 and I think it was very important because obviously she fully knew my situation and my circumstances and I wouldn't have wanted to try and explain it all again to somebody else and fortunately because my ex-husband attended some of the sessions she actually got to meet him and see at first hand how he was and the issues around our relationship really ... which was incredibly helpful ... which was such that would have been quite difficult to just explain to somebody and that's not just my words her perception as well was that she found he was quite an unusual man and it was incredibly beneficial that she met him

Payment for Counselling

A freely available Counselling Service is valued by people who are in financial difficulty.

D:1 ... and because I didn't have much money at the time it was also an unbiased body who wouldn't charge me or charge a nominal fee if I could afford it ... and at that point in time that's what I needed

A:5 and the other thing about the service is that at that point I was actually financially snookered ... although I was in paid employment I didn't have full access to my finances and it was so important and so helpful that it was optional about how I could pay ... or that I could give a gift in the future... if I'd have had to pay I wouldn't have been able to go

A:5 the financial side at that point was very important and even when I went to the Relate counsellor for the first time she said because I was in paid employment I was expected to pay ... I don't remember the amount ... and when I told her my financial circumstances she wasn't very accepting of that or very understanding and I actually felt very embarrassed

Clients would recommend the Counselling Service.

People believe in the value of the Counselling Service and would recommend it to others, and/or would like to 'give something', because they have personally benefited from the experience.

A:8 I wanted to really express how important and how beneficial it had been to me and I wanted to be encouraging about the work and I would want the work to continue because I can see just how important it is ... and I would have no hesitation in recommending somebody else to use the counselling service

D:4 ... and I personally would recommend the Counselling Service to anybody because they've certainly helped me ... and if I could go back I would but work being as it is I can't guarantee making the sessions ... but I would definitely recommend the Service

A:6 ... and something I've been thinking about is that I would like to give something ...to do something more regularly ... because I believe in the value of the Service

Counselling Relationship

Qualities of the Counsellor.

A counsellor who demonstrates understanding and reveals 'human' qualities is valued by clients

A:7 I did feel very much that this was not some sort of ... [gestures with flat of hand facing her own face and brings it down the length of her body, suggesting an invisible barrier between us] well I can't do that on tape ... sort of blanked faced individual just sitting there reflecting, paraphrasing 'well thats very interesting' and 'how do you feel about that' ... that wasn't happening at all... it was two people interacting in a relationship and she would make references at times to her own situation and her own family ... and that felt really good ... I liked that and it wasn't my perception of how a typical counselling situation would be ... I felt very much I was interacting with another human being

A:10 its another real human being ... another real human life ... facing family problems and situations and difficulties... yes it was good ... I didn't want 'blanked faced' person that was so remote as my counsellor ... I didn't need that ... because I think thats a bit how the Relate person was ... which I suppose is the stereotypical kind of counsellor

B:8 she [counsellor] doesn't come across as a 'professional' [emphasises stern gesture, sitting up very straight, raising shoulders] she comes across as somebody who is very loving with deep understanding of humanity... and within a certain framework she is at my disposal ... it is professional in one sense... but because we've known each other for so long its not quite as clearly defined as me going for a certain number of sessions

B:1 and I suppose what it has really done for me ... apart from the initial ... the fact that [counsellor's name] was able to help me and to be with me in what I was going through ... and with a complete understanding which at the time I just couldn't believe that she had that complete understanding ... which nobody else could give to me ... and because I'm on my own ... I think what has happened is that [counsellor's name] has been there for me since to reassure me I'm not going round the bend when one hasn't got someone to talk to ... and to sort of reassure me that my thoughts are alright and valid and in one sense quite normal

A:7 we laughed a lot ... we had a lot of fun as well ... there was a lot of humour

A:7 and I'm sure that's her skill really ... her confidence in her ability ... and I don't think that she is the sort of individual that needs to conform to what is 'expected' because she would say things like "this is not really counselling but ..." and it was wonderful... it was wonderful ... it was really good

B:7 rules and regulations are quite useful actually in defining what you are doing ... and it can be done lovingly ... it actually helps to know the reality; ... that there are borders that one cannot step cross

B:7 I've not put this into words before ... now that I am putting it into words for you ... I'm looking at it slightly different with more of a distance ... you see someone wanting to help and care for others ... these are wonderful attributes but it doesn't necessarily mean they can help ... often they're helping themselves ... and also I do turn away from the dutiful help which is contained within the Church ... and if it is not done with love it isn't ... it has to be done with love

D:5 [feelings toward her counsellor] I suppose ... not quite love but ... agapae? ... a familial love I think ... somebody who is very familiar ... almost like an old sweater you've had for donkeys years but because it's so warm and cosy and brings back lovely memories of a nice warm fire ... you keep ... it's almost that sort of feeling I used to get ... a sort of warm glowing feeling that was sort of winter in front of a hearth ... this wonderful feeling of contentness ... yes ... just happy to sit and be ... without anything else having to happen

Feeling safe and comfortable.

Feeling safe and comfortable, being supported by and trusting the counsellor are significant aspects of the counselling relationship.

B:3 I mean with a counsellor one has to feel safe and it has to be someone you can trust

C:6 I do feel very comfortable with her ... I think that took a bit of time though to get to that stage

D:5 she was somebody I would like to class as a very good friend ... even though I probably will never see her again ... she's the type of motherly person everybody would like to have ... and doesn't ... because with your own mother you always end up having a blazing row ... and so she's [counsellor] provided that security type comfort ... probably unknowingly ... she probably didn't realise that that's how I felt

D:5 the comfort that she was giving back ... she gave me comfort ... not verbally but just by her sheer presence I think ... she was a very comfortable person to be around

A:11 that process of being supported up to the point where I reached ... it was just after I put the relationship on the altar ... that it then broke and all the planning to go ... so I had to be supported to reach that point where I could do that ... that trust... that if it was going to be taken from me [the relationship] it was actually going to be the best thing ... which I couldn't see ... so that was a very very significant part of the time really

B:2 and it's that [the counselling] which has helped me without overloading my family or overloading friends ... it's just allowed me to ... I mean I've never stopped work or anything like that ... right the way through from the time [husband's name] died ... so that I feel if I hadn't have had that support in its various stages ... I think ... well ... I'm not quite sure where I would have been

D:8 I don't think I'd change anything ... she [counsellor] was very helpful... and very comforting ... she was very supportive in an unobtrusive kind of way

Feeling accepted.

Feeling respected, accepted and not being judged by the counsellor are encouraging and valuable aspects of the counselling relationship.

D:1 and I found the lady I went to see ... who unfortunately I had to break off with due to work commitments ... I found a] very unbiased b] very helpful and c] very supportive ... which is what you are looking for in a counsellor ... I think

C:12 she created this environment for me ... and it was O.K. ... even though I felt dreadful and probably made her feel dreadful [laughs] ... it was O.K. to feel like that ... it was O.K. to cry ... a huge relief

A:8 So when you were distressed she was able to handle that ?
yes ... she was just comfortable with it ... totally accepting... it didn't phase her ... she would just handle it ... I always left feeling better

A:8 I felt she was totally trusting ... I had no concerns about confidentiality whatsoever ... and I found that she accepted me as I was ... some sessions I would be very very stressed and very very upset and very low and she would handle that every time ... just as she did at other sessions when I would be more positive

C:11 But it sounds like it was O.K. with your counsellor for you not to speak ... to be distressed and upset and crying?

oh yes ... it was helpful ... in the end ... actually she was very good ... saying "It's O.K. for you to be like this ... this is how you feel and it's O.K. for you to feel like this"

D:3 no judgments at all ... I think the only judgment she ever made was ... "this lady has come for counselling ... she needs help ... I'm glad she's come to me if she thinks I can help her" ... and that's the only judgment I think she ever made ... I was never made to feel small ... insignificant ... unpleasant

D:2 she was just there ... and she wasn't in anyway saying "oh you shouldn't have done that" ... she said "well how do you feel ?"

D:8 the first two sessions I was thinking "why am I doing this ... why am I here?" ... and then gradually as I relaxed into it and thinking that she wasn't judging me at all ... I was thinking ... "Do I really trust this lady to open out?" ... and I found that yes I did

A:7 it was also valuable because I felt she liked me ... well she told me ... every session we had she would make some ... whether it was consciously or not or whether it would just happen I don't know ... but she would make some positive promotion about me as a person ... or something I'd done ... or a plan that I had ... or an idea ... and that was a very very positive strength ... that really helped me because at the point when I'd gone into counselling my self-esteem was very very low it had been very very damaged and it felt really good to hear her say these things to me ... and to encourage me

D:5 I was just able to be myself ... you know ... I have to put on this act of the professional at work ... or I've got to put on an act of ... I'm this that or the other in the pub or what have you ... if I'd had a lousy week and decided to burst out crying ... all she'd do is hand over a box of tissues and she'd just sit there and wait ... and wait ... it was wonderful ... it was what I needed at the time ... she'd allowed me to put all that behind me

A:2-A:3 a reminder really of a loving and accepting God who does forgive completely and is totally accepting and I suppose that is reflected in the way the counsellor talks with you

and respects you and is there

A:3 You're saying that the nurturing and the kind of holding ...before you spoke about accepting and respect ... you very clearly felt those things?

yes very clearly ... very very clearly ... and I think it was important at that time because I've got a very good very supportive family ... but I think I needed somebody who was outside of the family I needed someone who was actually objective

D:4 she was interested in me

Counselling Process

Relief to talk.

Knowing the counsellor wants to listen and being able to talk freely about painful and very private issues to someone who is outside the immediate situation is a relief and very helpful.

D:3 to think that this lady [counsellor] actually wanted to listen to what I had to say

A:3 I've got a very good very supportive family and ... they were great and they listened to me and they were there for me but I think I needed somebody who was outside of the family I needed someone who was actually objective

D:8 I'm very glad that my friend persuaded me to go ... I kept thinking ... "no counselling is for sissies" ... that was my impression ... but now I'd recommend it to anybody ... because it helped me so much ... I never thought that sitting down and talking to somebody could be so much help

C:4 talking about all this each week with my counsellor ... and she would make suggestions of what I could do ... helped me managed

C:3 so thats how it started and I wish I had done it earlier actually ... even talking to somebody ... just telling her [director of counselling over the phone] that I was just desperate... that I'd told somebody ... such a relief

D:3 she [counsellor] never seemed to do much ... but in a way that was the most helpful thing ... she was just there ... she was just there ... and that was what I needed at the time ... I needed somebody outside the whole situation ... to be there ... and just sit and listen while I poured out any amount of garbage known to mankind ... and I would eventually ... sort of half way through the session get to what I was actually worried about

D:3 she [counsellor] would listen ... maybe it wouldn't work for everybody but it certainly worked for me ... but I think ... from other people who have been for counselling ... not necessarily with C.S.R. counsellors ... that counsellors will definitely be able to adapt to the person they are actually working with

D:2 I was in that much of a mess ... and the lady I went to see let me talk ... which is unusual for me because I'm not the greatest speaker ... I'm more of a listener

C:11 to be honest I didn't want to admit that I needed to go [to counselling] so I was a bit ... I had very mixed feelings about going to start with ... but it was a relief to tell someone ... but for two or three sessions I couldn't really speak properly because I was so upset ... and

looking back it was horrible ... thinking about it

C:12 So at the beginning ... those first few weeks were very emotional and traumatic ... and then gradually you were able to tell your story ... although you had mixed feelings ... just to tell somebody was a relief?

Yes thats right ... you see ... I think really in my case I had always shared things very much with my husband ... but because he was like he was I couldn't share anything ... but then I was trying not to talk to him about the children or anything really ... I felt so lonely ... in the middle of the night I felt so abandoned at times ... so although I was reluctant to go [to counselling] ... it was a relief ... just to be like that

D:3 so for me ... someone who is normally quite reserved ... to be able to just talk without somebody stopping me or wondering why I'm gabbling on ... was a great release and that really is what I think helped me the most

C:7 just spending the whole session talking about him was really helpful ... and very beneficial

C:6 I felt that I needed to speak about my feelings ... which I hadn't shared with anybody ... and as I said I did feel when we were talking about what had gone on ... it did almost feel a natural thing in the end to say those things and how I was feeling

So you felt she [counsellor] understood?

yes I did ... just the way she said things ... her replies ... made me understand that she had thought about it ... she was almost giving me permission not to feel guilty ... well she was doing that actually

D:2 and just by gradually talking to this particular lady it helped sought out my own inner mess I think ... and after speaking to her I no longer feel upset about the fact that I'm adopted ... which is a fairly major step forward ... and I certainly no longer feel upset about the fact that I had an abortion ... I now accept that

D:4 How did you know she wanted to listen?

I don't know ... she would always start off a conversation ... I suppose the way she would sit down ... she would make herself comfortable and settle down almost as if she was going to hear a story ... she's not leaning forward to prompt the next bit ... she's just settling back and letting everything flow over, through and around her ... it was only afterwards I realised that ... at the time ... I mean at the time occasionally I thought "for crying out loud will you at least ask me something ... I'm gabbling here and ..." but as I say sometimes in the gabble she would pick up on things that she would maybe prompt the next week ... you know that throw away comment ... I mean she would listen very carefully ... it was amazing ... because sometimes a throw away comment would suddenly be the focus of what we would discuss the following week ... and that was proof that she had listened ... that she wasn't just thinking "oh well I'm here for the next hour or so and I'll just let this lady chatter on for that length of time and then say times up" ... she actually picked up on things I didn't always realise were important ... and I would think "actually yes ... maybe that is why I threw that into the conversation ... and that to me was the mark of somebody a] very sincere and b] very very good at their job ... and their job is helping people

C:5 and it was good to be able to talk about what had happened each week

Dealing with feelings of anger

Acknowledging and expressing feelings of anger and resentment is helpful because it enables people to 'move on'

C:7 just spending the whole session talking about him was really helpful ... and very beneficial ... I mean she [counsellor] did make me realise that yes it was O.K. to feel angry and bitter and resentful ...and that once I acknowledged that I did feel like that ... then I could move on ... so that was good and that did help

B:5 when I think about the emotional therapy I had at first ... I think one of the most important things was recognising the anger inside me

B:6 anyway I just knelt and hit these cushions and I really let go for the first time ... but then the thing was that once I was exhausted from that I was able to get up and dance ... and I think that is A recurring theme ... I mean its a very real thing that you reach a point of despair and all of that ... and then the joy comes rushing in ... and the angels sing

C:6 I had this guilt feeling that I shouldn't be feeling like this ... I really shouldn't be feeling like this ...really terrible resentment ... and I thought I shouldn't be feeling like that

C:6 I mean she [counsellor] said to me 'you are allowed to feel like that ... you are allowed to feel angry' ... she actually said that 'you are allowed'

C:7 I mean I was glad I told her [counsellor] but I still felt guilty ... I still felt that I really shouldn't feel like this [resentment etc.] ... but something did start to happen ... you know that we are human beings ... we have got these feelings ... we can be angry and resentful and feel guilty ...we are human beings and human beings are like that ... I mean on one occasion I spent the whole session talking about my brother-in-law ... who really made me extremely angry and I blamed him for a lot of things... which was a bit silly really... but I did take on board what I had to do ... that I had to let it go... because it wasn't doing me any good and he didn't know I felt like that

Working in between counselling sessions

The effect of the counselling session is not always immediate, clients continue 'working' in between sessions and after ending.

B:2 because very often I would come away and think ... for one thing I'd come away very often ...because its not on a regular basis ... I'd think 'oh gosh ... I've dealt with sort of getting up to date and now I've got all the other things to think about ... and to work through' ... and also just single phrases would stay in my mind and allow me to look at situations in a different way ... it wouldn't happen immediately ... I mean [counsellor's name] would say something and I wouldn't necessarily react and perhaps a few days later I would think 'oh its still there ... come on lets look at it'

C:8 it made me think about a whole lot more about other aspects of my life than just my initial problem ... and I continue to think about things in between the counselling sessions and after I stopped ... it goes on all the time really ... but I mean I don't think about it as much as I did

D:7 she [counsellor] would always ask me to think about something for the following week ... although we didn't always discuss that the following week because something could have happened during the week that superseded it ... but at least it got me thinking ... so that whatever good I'd had during the session ... good or bad because occasionally they would be fairly horrific ... but whatever good or bad came from it I was able to hold on to that and deal with it or build on it during the week

C:11 So the first few sessions you were very emotional? ... Physically crying?
yes ... oh yes ... and then I couldn't sleep when I came back [from counselling session] ... I was thinking "should I have done this ... should I have said that" ... so it did take a bit of time

A:2 ... as I say he anointed me with oil and I continue to remember that time ... the things that he said to me

Gaining insight.

As the counselling process moves on clients begin to gain more clarity about their situation and begin to recognise, and take responsibility for, their own needs.

C:8 as I was going to the counselling sessions I realised that I was just fitting in with everyone else ... you know my in-laws ... not so much my husband ... but I was just doing what they wanted me to do ... and then I realised my children were like that as well ... I don't mean that in a nasty way ... they really are very nice children [laughs]

A:6 it was so significant particularly at the beginning ... I was sort of hanging on for the next session ... that's how it felt because there was so much confusion and so much pain I did really find the sessions very very comforting and also I gained more clarity ... although this took some time before both myself and the counsellor fully understood the situation

C:8 because I think I was very bad at saying 'no' because I felt guilty ... saying 'no' to anybody in need ... or anything really ... and I don't know why

D:2 and I have accepted ... as I say I don't necessarily like what I had to do but I've now come to accept it as the only decision at that point in time that was available to me

C:9 when I think about it ... it's been building up for years ... and I was gradually having more and more things thrown at me ... and whether it was my fault or not ... it might have been [laughs]

B:2 I think the most important thing about counselling is not that there's somebody there to lead you and hold you up ... but actually to make you think and to work it out for yourself ... that's the important bit

C:9 at the beginning I did still feel guilty ... but then I kept saying to myself 'you must say no because you will be ill yourself if you take on anything more'

C:9 you see before all this happened ... if there was a call for help I would go ... but now I'm thinking more clearly ... more logically ... 'this is not your problem... it's not your responsibility ... you don't have to take this on' ... and I am thinking more like that... but ... I do still get those feelings ... that it is selfish [to say no] and I do still find that quite difficult ... but then I have to remember that I can't always deal with it ... I knew I was getting to that stage and that if I didn't help myself I'd be no help to anybody

C:10 and I also think that for me ... I do what I think is right and what's best ... and obviously it hasn't always been ... perhaps best for somebody else but not for me

C:7 and I said 'hang on a minute ... I think we've got something on that weekend' and I've never said that before I've always said yes that's alright ... and even put things off if he's coming ... it felt a bit guilty doing that really ... but I did realise that I've got a life as well ... and my life is important as well as his

C:7 but it's not easy ... it's very very difficult saying no to your children...you see the thing is I've always done it for them ... anything that they've wanted doing...you just run round after them... so now I say 'are you sure you cannot do that yourself' ... and ... 'you should be able to do that yourself ... but if you can't I will do it when it's convenient'... [laughs] something like that

C:4 well actually deep down I knew that's what I needed [time to herself] ... I knew she [counsellor] was right ... but actually doing it was very difficult... that was the hard part ... although I knew I needed that ... taking it was a different matter... but because I was seeing a counsellor I was able to tell the family what I had to do ... I could say 'she says I have to do this' ... she gave me permission ... I mean even my husband had to get used to it ... I would say 'I'm going for a walk' ... even just 10 minutes around the streets ... 'and don't come with me'

C:4 I knew I needed that really ... and also I needed to get away from my husband... he was so ill ... but most of me was saying 'no you can't ... because you're his wife and you've got to support him' ... and that was very difficult

C:4 so I would say 'I'm going swimming or whatever and I'll be back at such and such a time' ... but it wasn't easy ... I did find that very hard to do at the beginning ... but I knew it was what I needed to do

D:2 and just by gradually talking to this particular lady it helped sort out my own inner mess I think ... and after speaking to her I no longer feel upset about the fact that I'm adopted ... which is a fairly major step forward ... and I certainly no longer feel upset about the fact that I had an abortion ... I now accept that ... O.K. maybe it's not what I'd have chosen to do but she [counsellor] helped me through the fact that I was adopted ... she made me realise that even though I don't like taking life ... I had no option ... I would have ruined my own life ... and that of my family ... and at the time that was the only decision to make ... I still don't like it but she's allowed me to come to terms with it ... which I think is the main thing ... I don't think counselling is there to make everything sweet and nice ... counselling is there to help you sort through why you've got a problem ... how to solve it if you can ... and if you can't solve it at least be able to live with it

A:11 and I believe ... I know ... I asked for guidance and Jesus took my hand ... so I could see really clearly what was happening ... and by Christmas time I had absolute clarity of what had happened all the way through my relationship with him [husband] and I was able to speak to people who I thought I would never have a conversation with ... and I did ... and it just gave me the confidence ... without which it would have been very difficult ... it took time to get to that point where I would be ready and actually wanting to see this picture ... it was a process

Significant life changes.

Individuals experience increased levels of self-esteem after counselling which leads to significant life changes.

D:6 yes ... I got more self confidence ... I feel happier being me ... yes I have down times ... I don't think I'd be human if I didn't ... but the down times come less and less frequently ... and I can only pinpoint that back to the counselling

C:12 I just didn't realise how much we [women] beat ourselves almost [laughs] with a big stick ... but I think I've changed ... the whole experience [of counselling] has changed me ... or changed the way I cope ... I mean there were times when I would feel physically sick when I was on my way home ... at the thought of coming in here ... wondering what I was going to face ... and I know we've still got a long way to go ... I mean I don't know how we're going to get [husband's name] back to work ... but things don't seem as bad now ... I feel better able to cope

D:5 I mean I won't forget ... it would be awful in a way to forget because what happens to you builds up who you are now ... but it's allowed me to sort of step up from that and try and move on ... and I hope I have succeeded in doing that

C:12 things are better ... but we're not out of the wood yet ... I mean I don't know if [husband's name] will ever go back to work ... but at least I feel now that I am stronger and I know how to ... I'm not saying I know how to deal with him that's not quite right ... but probably I know how to deal with myself [laughs] so that I can deal with him [laughs]

D:9 I've moved on and up ... and I don't think anybody can ask more than that ... it's good to be alive now ... which is a nice thing to be able say

A:3 I actually feel that [without counselling] ... you know ... I could imagine going down a very very different road ... I just imagine sort of ... it all sounds very dramatic really but you know ... sort of anti-depressants and ... sort of ... well ... psychiatric services because you were so sort of traumatised really by what's happened ...

D:6 I mean before hand [before counselling] I was quite prepared to just jog along at what I was doing ... I had no ambition to move any further on ... and I wouldn't say I'm particularly ambitious but I have got an ambition to better myself ... I said before I've taken up studying and I'm going to train as an accountant ... I mean I would never have thought of that a couple of years back ... so things have definitely changed ... and for the better

D:6 it's only having thought back ... knowing you were coming that I've suddenly realised how far forward I've actually gone ... it's only now when I think about how much was stirred up when I was talking with her [counsellor] ... that I realise how far on I've come ... how much I've moved on

C:9 I even said to someone the other day ... she said to me "I know you ... you are [son's name] mother" and I said "Yes I am [son's name] mother and I'm very proud of that but I am also me!" [laughs] ... and she was a bit taken aback ... I've realised that people say that such a lot ... you're so and so's mother or so and so's wife or daughter-in-law ... you know ... I don't know whether that's silly or not

D:6 oh yes [very emphasised] a very significant effect [the counselling] my life style has changed ... even something as ludicrous as going and having my waist length hair hacked off to a chin length bob ... which I never would have thought of doing because I sort of hid behind my hair kind of thing ... I've even started to lose some weight ... I mean my whole life has managed to move up a couple of gears ... and I think without this particular person's [counsellor] help it wouldn't have done

D:5 I mean I have certainly managed to change my job ... get a better job ... get a better paid job ... a better quality of life really ... I have more respect from my peers I think [very thoughtful here]

A:6 I am ready now [to finish counselling] ... with all the different legal issues about the divorce being sorted ... and me getting myself sorted ... starting a new course at the end of the month and different things ... it feels as if chapters are closing ... I don't think it ever just happens just like that really ... I think right throughout the year I've been making steps forward into a new life ... and getting stronger all the time

D:3-D:4 I felt as if I could be a normal human being ... that may not seem a lot to many people ... but to somebody like myself who at that point in time felt they were slightly lower than mud ... it was great ... you know ... to think that this lady actually wanted to listen to what I had to say ... that I was treated as if I could go out and ... not necessarily conquer the world ... but certainly make my mark in it ... I started to feel pride in myself again ... which I hadn't done for quite some years

A:5 healing me and enabling me to understand fully what was happening and also what the past nature of my relationship with him [husband] had been ... which I hadn't really seen or understood and that was very important and I think it's all been incredibly important for me

now at this point now I'm on my own and making a new life ... how I've come to terms with it and how I move on

C:8 I think its [counselling] made me realise that I'm me [emphasis] ... not somebody's wife or mother or sister-in-law or daughter-in-law [laughs] I'm me [emphasis] and it's been a long time since I thought that ... I've been totally devoted to my family ... and I think ... I mean I don't regret that ... that's what I chose to do ... but I think they sometimes give me the message "you're there for me" ... but I had never thought of that

A:10-A:11 when I think of where I was a year ago and where I am now ... it's like two different people ... because I think when you've been in a relationship that's obviously having problems and when your confidence is getting drained away ... and then obviously when we [husband] went through some very very difficult circumstances that we did ... I felt like I was at the bottom of a pit really ... that I couldn't get out ... so I've been doing all sorts of things ... running a half marathon ... learning how to Salza ... and work have really looked after me ... and I've just been awarded a bursary to take a year out to do a Masters and the NHS are helping with that ... it still hurts of course with the divorce and everything having gone through so recently ... there are papers to sign ... things still need sorting out ... it's still happening ... I know there is still a way to go ... but I know where I've come to ... from the bottom of the pit

C:7 and I learned to say "no" to him sometimes ... and I've never done that ... he's been my brother-in-law for 26 years and he's always "I'm going to do this ..." and "I am coming down on such and such a day to go to the golf" ... meaning that he would be staying here ... and I said "hang on a minute ... I think we've got something on that weekend" and I've never said that before I've always said yes that's alright ... and even put things off if he's coming ... it felt a bit guilty doing that really ... but I did realise that I've got a life as well ... and my life is important as well as his ... because for a long time I felt that not only he was doing it but my children were also doing it ... and my father-in-law was like that ... and I don't want to sound nasty ... because I was very fond of him ... but if he said something ... you did it ... and so I started [laughs] being like it with the children ... and they were grown up ... but it was still ... "can you pick me up ... or go there?" or "can you do this for me?" ... and now I would say "well it's not very convenient at the moment ... but I'll do it when I can" or "perhaps you could do that yourself" ... so that's been happening

D:8 I don't think I'd change anything [about the counselling process] ... she [counsellor] was very helpful ... and very comforting ... she was very supportive in an unobtrusive sort of way ... it was as if she helped up that first flight of steps and then said "right ... there you are ... you now know what you're doing ... it's one foot in front of the other" ... and I took the rest of the steps myself ... she's done what she can ... and sort of said "well I've given you all the help I can ... you're not quite on your own but go for it ... see what you can make of life from now on in" ... and I think she'd be quite happy with what I have made of my life from now on in [laughs] ... I certainly wouldn't have taken the path I'm taking now if it hadn't been for her

D:8 and I've also realised that it takes a great deal of strength to go to a counsellor ... rather than it being for 'sissies' ... to actually admit to yourself and somebody else that you need help takes a heck of a lot of courage

B:5 So through counselling you have learned to acknowledge your pain?
yes ... yes ... last week [when I was in pain] at the time I wanted to phone everyone up ... I did in fact phone my vicar ... I phoned [counsellor's name] ... I phoned a friend ... and nobody was there ... and I said 'God just intends that I should deal with this myself' ... and I did ... and he gave me the strength to do it ... and that was an absolute reality ... and to have been given the support [counselling] to realise that is just beyond words

B:3 because I am terribly human ... and can get very lonely and it's ghastly ... that aspect is

very difficult ... and counselling has helped me ... not to come to terms ... I haven't come to terms [with husband's death] because I don't think one ever does ... but to sort of help on that as well

B:9 The experience seems to have been so significant for you?

well in fact you have put into a word ... the word healing ... it is that ... I do feel everybody actually needs constant healing ... of the spirit [softly ... crying ... very emotional]... it should be part of one's daily office ... and I don't feel I shall ever say goodbye to [counsellor's name] ... and I think I've still got some healing to be done ... but it is about learning to ... [long silence] ... I've got lost I'm sorry ... I have already said that God has led me to this ... I might have been pushed in the direction initially by [brother's name] ... but I think God has led me through ... well God leads one anyway ... it's just a matter of allowing God to lead one